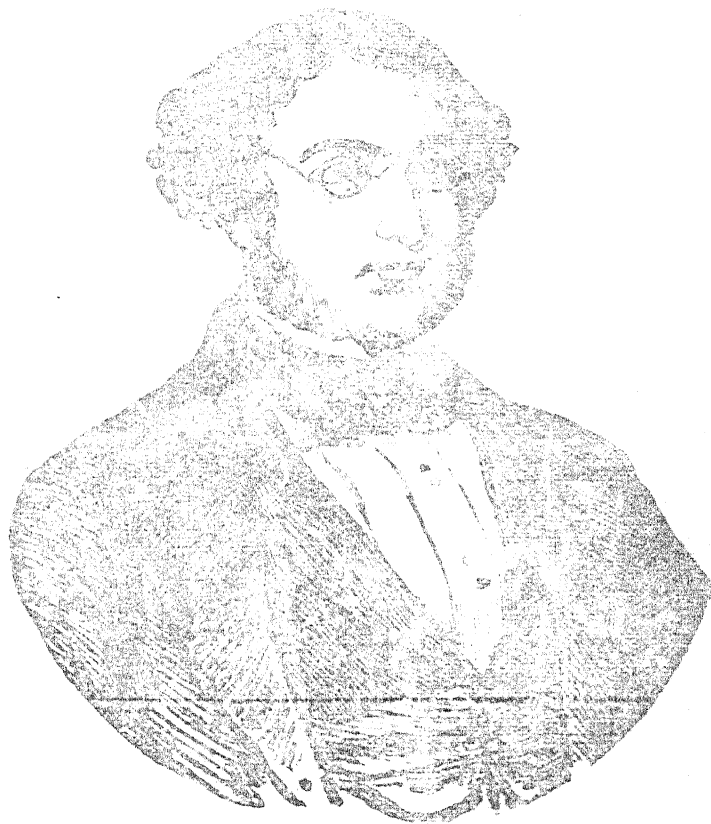


THE
MYSTERIES
OF THE
COURT OF LONDON



BY
George W. M. REYNOLDS

THE SUPERIOR WATCH Co.,

Post Box No. 167 ::

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MADRAS

Fourth Series.

THE
Mysteries
OF THE
Court of London

BY
G. W. M. REYNOLDS

NEW EDITION

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The Mysteries

OF

The Court of London

VOLUME XVI.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE SELF-SACRIFICE DEMANDED.

WE must now return to the Countess of Lascelles. She had retired to her own chamber shortly after Adolphus conducted the lawyer from the library to the room in which the old Earl had met his death and where his murder was unmasked in the manner already described. It was understood that if Mr. Slater was successful in the aim which had induced him to take up his quarters in that chamber, he was to ring the bell continuously and violently, not merely as a summons for the household, but likewise as a signal that he had succeeded.

On retiring to her chamber, the Countess of Lascelles did not begin to disapprel herself; she had not the slightest inclination for slumber—her mind was agitated with a variety of conflicting feelings. Great was her suspense in respect to the issue of Mr. Slater's experiment: for it was absolutely necessary to combine all possible evidences in order to bring the foul deed completely home to the assassin. She endeavoured to compose herself as much as she was able, and to steady the beatings of her fluttering heart as well as the throbbings of her brain: but these were indeed no easy tasks; and instead of sitting down tranquilly to await the signal so earnestly hoped for, she paced the chamber with quick uneven steps. Nevertheless, very

different indeed was Ethel's present state of mind from what it had recently been when she had so confidently but loathingly regarded Adolphus as a murderer, and when day after day she was plunged into utter bewilderment or excited to the liveliest indignation on hearing herself denounced as a murderess. Yes: now that the horrible mystery had been so far cleared up, a tremendous weight was lifted from her mind: but still there was much yet to be done—and even when all this should have been accomplished, might Ethel ever hope for the enjoyment of happiness again?

Every now and then she stopped short in her agitated walk—and listened. Surely she had heard the bell? surely it was tingling in her ear? surely its vibrating sounds reached her from the distance where it hung? No—it was mere fancy on her part: all was in reality still: it was only that half-singing, half-droning sound which the ear perceives when the blood mounts up into the excited brain. But hark! now indeed the bell rings!—the sound is unmistakable—it peals with a violence that reverberates through the mansion—it is the signal of the lawyer's success, and Makepeace is unmasked!

Ethel's first impulse was to rush from the room and repair to the chamber where the scene announced by that signal was taking place: she felt an almost irresistible anxiety to assure herself that the detection of Makepeace was indeed complete, and that to no

other or unforeseen circumstance was to be attributed the ringing of that bell. But all in a moment a fearful apprehension seized upon her—the apprehension lest Makepeace should proclaim her past amour with Adolphus. Her guilty conscience in this respect gave to her alarm the strength and potency of an absolute certainty that what she dreaded could not fail to occur; and thus she no sooner found herself relieved from one source of deepest anxiety than she had to encounter another. She remained in her room a prey to the most fearful suspense.

All of a sudden one of her maids rushed in half-dressed, exclaiming, "O my lady! my lady! the assassin is discovered!—it is Makepeace!"

"I had foreseen it—I knew that it would be so," responded Ethel, much excited: "it was for this reason that Mr. Slater came to the house——"

"Ah!" ejaculated the maid: and then she at once comprehended how it was that her mistress had not as yet retired to rest.

"I will go to the drawing-room," said the Countess: I must hear all particulars—I am full of suspense and anxiety——"

"Suspense and anxiety, my lady?" cried the maid, somewhat in astonishment. Why, the murderer is discovered!—it turns out to be that infamous hypocrite Makepeace who went on so at the time about his poor dear lord——"

"I will go to the drawing-room, I tell you," interrupted Ethel still more impatiently: "and do you request his lordship the Earl—or Mr. Slater—his lordship will perhaps be better—to come to me there as soon as possible. Go quick, girl, quick!"

Ethel was very much excited, as the reader may judge from her unguarded as well as broken sentences; and the maid, at first astonished, came to the very natural conclusion that the excitement of all the proceedings had produced a somewhat hysterical effect upon her mistress. She therefore hastened away to do her ladyship's bidding: and returning to the vicinage of the deceased Earl's chamber, she reached the dressing-room door just as Makepeace was proclaiming the illicit loves of Ethel and Adolphus. The maid—who was a pure-minded, artless inexperienced girl enough, and who had never previously suspected

that which she now heard—was transfixed with a stupefying consternation. In a few moments, however, she heard the footsteps of Mr. Slater and the two domestics who had accompanied him, descending the upper flight after their successful search for the creak of gold: and the maid, not choosing to be deemed a listener there, hurried away.

But she had not acquitted herself of the mission she had received from Ethel; and when the next minute she thought of it, events were hurrying on with too much rapidity to furnish an immediate opportunity for the delivery of her ladyship's message either to Mr. Slater or the Earl of Lascelles. The officers of justice were coming to take the murderer into custody. Again was the tale of the illicit amour vociferously proclaimed—Makepeace was borne off—some of the domestics dispersed to their own chambers—others continued grouped together upon the landing outside the dressing-room door, to discuss the fearfully exciting incidents which had just occurred—and the lawyer, deeming it better to leave the young Earl to himself after the overwhelming exposure, retired to a bed-chamber—where, however, as the reader has seen, he was presently aroused to receive the confession of the murderer at the neighbouring station-house.

Adolphus had tarried behind in the fatal chamber where the late Earl had met his death, and whence the assassin had just been borne off in the custody of the officers of justice. The unhappy young man threw himself upon his knees by the side of that couch—buried his face in his hands—and sobbed audibly. What was to become of Ethel?—how would he himself ever be able to look the world in the face? His position was fearful: it was only just a single shade better than it recently was when subject to the extortionate demands of Makepeace on the one hand and to the accusations levelled against him by the Countess on the other.

Meanwhile the young maid-servant had retreated into a room on the same landing, in the hope of finding an opportunity to deliver Ethel's message to Adolphus, whom she had not as yet seen emerge from the fatal chamber. She kept the door ajar in the room to which she had thus retreated, and watched for his appearance. Several minutes elapsed; and at length she

heard footsteps. She beheld the young Earl come forth: a light that was burning in the passage, threw its beams upon his countenance; and the damsel felt her blood run cold as she saw how ghastly pale and how convulsed it was. She scarcely dared issue from the room to deliver the message; and yet she felt that under existing circumstances it was one which she ought not to keep back; for after such a frightful exposure the Countess and Adolphus might indeed have much to deliberate upon—and that speedily too. Accordingly, mustering all her courage, the lady's-maid came forth, and said to the Earl, "My lord, her ladyship bade me inform you that she is in the drawing room, and desires to see your lordship before you retire to your own chamber."

"Which drawing-room?" asked Adolphus, in a voice so deep and hollow that it made the girl recoil as if from the presence of an animated corpse.

"In the Red Drawing-room, my lord," she answered, regaining with a mighty effort a sufficiency of self-possession for the purpose.

She then fled away to her own chamber; and Adolphus proceeded to the Red Drawing-room, saying within himself, "Everything must be revealed to Ethel—it will be useless for me to conceal it—all the domestics would show her by their manner to-morrow that the terrible truth has been proclaimed. Good God! what will become of us both?—what will become of us?"

He entered the drawing-room; and as he appeared in the presence of Ethel, she was instantaneously struck by his worn, haggard, ghastly countenance,—a countenance which bespoke a thousand crushing evils; so that all her worst apprehensions were confirmed in an instant. He did not immediately speak—but fixed his eyes upon her: they had a hollow look—and, Oh! what a world of care was in their gaze!

"I understand you but too well, Adolphus," said the unhappy Countess, looking upon him with a gaze which in its expression was awfully akin to his own. "No sooner have circumstances emptied our cup of misery which was filled to the brim, than it is replenished to overflowing:"—then, after some deep guttural sounds, as if the words struck in her throat, she added, "Make peace has proclaimed everything—is it not so?"

"It is," he replied, "The miscreant has resolved that in *his* death would he do that which should embitter *our* lives until the end!"

"And the domestics," said the Countess,—*"they now know everything?"*

"Everything!" responded Adolphus. "Just heaven, it is frightful!"

"Frightful!" echoed the miserable lady: and turning aside for a few moments, she covered her face with her hands, her fingers pressing tight against her throbbing brows: but no tears trickled between those fingers—her's was now a despair too deep to find a relief in weeping. At length, as a thought suddenly struck her, she removed her hands from her face—and turning towards Adolphus, said, "It is now for you to do that which will materially alter our position before the world—and if not lift the branding disgrace completely from us, at all events divest it of its deepest shade of blackness."

"Good heavens! what mean you, Ethel?" exclaimed the young Earl, starting with sudden affright: for though he put this question, yet was he little at a loss to comprehend the significance of her words.

"Adolphus, you *do* understand me," she answered, at once fathoming all he thought and felt: "and it is most ungenerous of you not to proclaim without an instant's delay that everything which you can do shall be done!"

"Ethel, Ethel!" gasped the young Earl: and he could say no more—but sinking on a seat, he gazed in consternation upon her.

"Is it possible, Adolphus, that you do not understand what I mean?" she asked: "will you thus force me to explain in the most measured terms of language? Well, then, be it so! The world," continued Ethel impressively, "believes that you are the son of the late Earl of Lascelles—and therefore that I am your step-mother. With such a belief our unfortunate love, when proclaimed, will be regarded as infamy itself: for what, Adolphus, could be more horrible than an amour of so incestuous a dye? Society will drive me with execration from its midst—yourself with scorn and loathing. Is all this to be, when one word spoken from your lips will in a moment reduce our tremendous crime, as it now appears, to

a comparatively venial feeling? And that word must be spoken by your lips. Adolphus: it is the sacrifice which you must make for both our sakes. Oh, even then there will yet remain degradation enough for me—but spare me, Adolphus, that branding shame—that crowning infamy!”

“Ethel,” responded the young Earl, in the same deep hollow voice as before, “you know not what you ask. You bid me divest myself of my patrician rank—to pluck the coronet from my brow—to resign the broad domains which call me master—to sink into an obscurity which will be total, like a star that goes out—and what is perhaps worse, to find myself plunged into comparative poverty!”

“I have a rich jointure, Adolphus,” answered the Countess, with difficulty repressing a look of scorn and contempt at the objections which he proffered: “take it all—I abandon it to you, every shilling—I myself care not for poverty! But as for your title, you must resign it!”

“Never!” ejaculated the young Earl, goaded almost to madness by the thought.

“And yet there was a time, Adolphus,” rejoined Ethel, reproachfully, “when I believed that for my sake you would have abandoned rank—position—everything—”

“Oh, but the madness of that love has passed, Ethel—and not only with myself,” cried the young Earl, “but also with you! I cannot do it. To resign a proud title—an immense domain—No, no, I cannot!”

“Coward!” ejaculated the indignant lady; “you cared not to sacrifice me to your passion—but you recoil from the consequences! Did I not exert all my energies to remain virtuous? And was it not your incessant importunity—your frenzied entreaty—yes, even your threat of suicide which dragged me down into the abyss? And now you refuse to proclaim the word which is to mitigate the dark aspect of our iniquity! Why, insensate that you are you would in reality be a greater gainer than I: for how will the matter stand if you act as you ought to do? You are not the son of the late Earl of Lascelles: not one drop of his blood flows in your veins; and therefore no more discredit will attach to you for having intrigued with the Countess of Lascelles, than ever

does attach itself to a man who indulges in an affair of gallantry. You will not be spurned by the world—you may still lift your head high. But how different will it be with *me*!—for though relieved from the darkest stain of the stigma, yet enough of its hue will rest upon me to stamp me as a fallen woman. Now then, sir, what is your decision?”

“There was so much determination in the words, looks, and manner of the Countess of Lascelles, that Adolphus was smitten with a renewed consternation; and his dismayed looks were riveted upon the Countess. At length, as a sudden idea struck him, he sprang up from his seat, exclaiming, “Let us defy the world, Ethel!—let us set its opinion at naught! Let us dwell together—let us give back to each other all that love which we formerly cherished—”

“Never!” she ejaculated: and her eyes flashed sudden fire. “Never, Adolphus—never! The past has been fraught with guilt enough for us both—or at last for *me*: the future shall be stainless—it is impossible I could sin again!”

“But marriage, Ethel—”

“Marriage?” she shrieked forth. “What! while the world believes that you were indeed the son of my late husband? Oh,” she added, with the blighting, withering laugh of utter scorn, “to what wretched expedients is your fevered imagination reducing you?”

“Ethel, you may say and do what you like,” exclaimed the young Earl—“but you cannot force me—”

“Cannot force you?” she interrupted him. “And that if I myself proclaim the truth? What if I declare—”

“Who will believe you, Ethel?” interrupted Adolphus. “What would my answer be? That it was a tale devised by an unhappy woman goaded almost to frenzy by her position—a tale devised for the purpose of palliating her fault before the world—”

“And you would do all this, Adolphus?” said the Countess, gazing upon him with an expression so strange, so wild, so sinister, that when he thought of it afterwards, he could not possibly fathom what its precise meaning might have been.

He did not immediately give any answer. Though in one sense he felt his position to be a tolerably strong one so far as the revelation of the secret of his birth might be concerned, yet on the

other hand, he was far from being at his ease in respect to a woman who in the present as well as in recent circumstances, had displayed a mental energy, a resoluteness, a determination of which she had seemed incapable in those times when she was the soft, the tender, the yielding, fond partner of his guilty love. He therefore saw that everything must be done to conciliate or appease the Countess, if possible, short of the absolute concession of that which she had demanded; and his ideas remained fixed upon the project of defying the world and its opinions—of making her his mistress again—or even of marrying her if she thought fit—anything, in a word, so long as he might place a seal upon her lips with regard to the one tremendous secret that might give him much trouble and annoyance, even if it did not ultimately tear him down altogether from the pedestal of rank and fortune.

While these reflections were passing through the mind of Adolphus, Ethel had turned aside, and was again meditating profoundly. Her countenance was of the most ashy pallor—her features were rigid: a sinister light burnt steadily in those eyes that had once beamed only with love and tenderness: the bosom which had been wont to palpitate with the softest and most voluptuous sensations, was now upheaved and perfectly still: she was motionless as a statue—but all that was passing within rendered her very different indeed from the sculptured marble's inanimation. Adolphus regarded her with a furtive and uneasy look; and when she at length turned again towards him, he gave a sudden start in evident apprehension that this terrible conflict of words and feelings was to be renewed.

"We have said enough for the present," observed the Countess, in a voice of such cold monotony that it afforded not the slightest indication to whatsoever might be passing in her mind.

"Let us separate for a few hours—to rest, if we can—but at all events let us separate. We shall find an opportunity of speaking to each other again; it must be soon—we will make up our minds how to act—and perhaps—perhaps," she added, her accents now becoming tremulous, and her features relaxing from their rigidity—"perhaps. Adolphus, we must make mutual

concessions, so that we may have a due regard for all that has taken place between us, and for all that we may now best do in the interest of us both."

"Ethel—dear Ethel!" exclaimed the young Earl, scarcely believing his own senses; "you are becoming yourself again! Heaven be thanked that you now speak thus rationally!"

"Let us separate, Adolphus," she said, in a still milder tone than that in which she had just spoken; "and it may be that when the storm of excitement is completely passed, and our senses are rescued from the consternation and bewilderment in which they have been lately plunged, we may yet show each other that we are not utterly selfish!"

In the exuberance of the hopeful feelings thus suddenly conjured up in the soul of Adolphus, he seized the hand of the Countess and pressed it to his lips. She snatched it away—but not with any particular violence; and the next instant hurried from the room.

It was about an hour afterwards that the messenger came from the station-house to fetch Mr. Slater to receive the confession of Makepeace; and as neither Adolphus nor Ethel knew that he was thus summoned—for in their respective chambers they heard not the ringing of the gate bell—the lawyer bade the domestic who had risen to answer that summons, forbear from disturbing his master and the Countess as they must have need of rest. On his return to the mansion, the solicitor sought his couch again: but when he arose at about eight in the morning, it was to receive the intelligence that the murderer had committed suicide in his cell. Then was it announced by a valet to Adolphus, and by one of her maids to Ethel, that during the past night Makepeace had delivered a full confession of his crime, and that a few hours later he had perished by his own hand.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

BLOOMFIELD.

It was eleven in the forenoon: Mr. Slater had taken his departure; and Ethel, who had not descended to the breakfast-table, sent an intimation to Adolphus that she would join him in a

few minutes in the library. The young Earl proceeded thither to await her coming; and as he paced to and fro with a certain degree of suspense, the following reflections passed through his mind:—

"Now is the crisis of this new phase in my fortune! Will she yield? or is the warfare to be renewed? Anguish render the soul capricious; and the mood may have changed again. If so, I must meet her valorously and resolutely. But no!—she will be reasonable: she saw last night that I was determined—and she altered visibly at the close of our interview. Why should she not agree with me to defy the world? Wealth procures pleasures that will enable us to live in enjoyment away from that society which banishes us. To love her again—No, that is impossible! The freshness—the enthusiasm—the glow of that love of mine, are gone for ever:—I feel, I feel that I am an altered man! But to toy with her as a mistress—or to endure her as a wife—Yes, yes—this is possible!—this is easy indeed!—and it may even be happiness since it will put an end to strife—it will relieve me from apprehension—it will rescue me from a vortex of perplexities and cares!"

The door opened; and the Countess of Lascelles made her appearance. The first glance which Adolphus threw upon her, filled him with hopefulness: for though she was still very pale, and looked as if she had passed an utterly sleepless night,—yet her features had lost that rigidity which expressed so stern a resoluteness of purpose: and if there were not actually a conciliatory smile upon her lips, there was at all events a softness of mien that contrasted strikingly with her aspect at their last interview.

"Ethel!" exclaimed the young Earl, hastening towards her, "your look renders me happier than I have been for some time past! I see that you intend to be reasonable: we are to deliberate calmly and in a friendly sense—we are not to meet for altercation as enemies, battling as it were for separate and divided interests—but we are to take counsel together for what may be best suited for us both!"

"Such is the spirit, Adolphus, in which I meet you this morning," answered Ethel; and she did now really smile sweetly though faintly: it was with a melancholy sweetness—and at

the same time she proffered him her hand.

"Dearest Ethel, I love you still!" he exclaimed, seizing that hand and conveying it to his lips. "Forgive me if last night I uttered things which were harsh—if I spoke of our love as something which had gone by, never to be recalled!"

"And I also, Adolphus," responded the Countess, suffering him to retain her hand without the slightest effort to withdraw it.—"I also must crave your forgiveness for the apparent implacability with which I urged a point that my better reason subsequently showed to be impossible of realization. There have been faults on both sides: let us cast a veil over them!"

Nothing could exceed the joy with which Adolphus listened to these words. He all of a sudden felt himself to be completely safe: his triumph was ensured with far less trouble than he had anticipated. In the enthusiasm of his feelings,—which the reader must not however mistake for a reviving love towards Ethel,—he snatched her in his arms and strained her to his breast. For a few moments she thus abandoned herself to him; and though she received the kisses which he imprinted upon her cheeks, she gave them not back again with her own lips.

"Now, dearest Ethel," said Adolphus, as she gently disengaged herself from his arms, "let us sit down and converse quietly and amicably—lovingly too—for may I not flatter myself that you have been reflecting upon the proposal I made to you last night?"

"Yes," she responded: and she sat down by his side. "Again must I assure you, my dear Adolphus," she continued—and this was the first time that she had used that caressing term of endearment for some weeks past,— "again must I assure you that when last night I rejected your proposals with so much emphatic sternness, I was not the mistress of myself. The intelligence of that frightful exposure had smitten me so cruel a blow—had come upon me with such suddenness—"

"Speak no more of it, dear Ethel!" interrupted the young Earl: "have we not agreed to throw a veil over the past—to forgive each other—to be lovers again—Aye, and did I not suggest," added Adolphus softly, "that we might be husband and wife if you chose?"

"I have made up my mind," answered Ethel, "to consent to anything that you think fit on one condition."

"Name, name it!" exclaimed Adolphus hastily: for he was suddenly smitten with the apprehension that it would be something that he might not be able to grant and re-open the arena for discussion and altercation.

"It is a very simple thing, my Adolphus," responded the Countess, with increasing softness of tone and winning tenderness of look: "it is merely that you will bear me hence—this very day—at once!—hence, from a place which has so many horrible and saddening associations!—hence from the great metropolis where dwell all those whom I may never look in the face again!"

"Is that all?" cried the young Earl, infinitely relieved. "Why, dearest Ethel, it is the very thing which I myself should have proposed: for I am sick of scenes whereunto are attached such sad and awful memories!"

"Then it shall be as I say, dear Adolphus," murmured the Countess, again voluntarily abandoning to him her hand: "and I thank you—Oh! I thank you for this ready acquiescence with my request. But when shall we depart?"

"This very day—as you have said," replied Adolphus. "Whither would you choose to go? To Bloomfield?—or on the Continent?"

The Countess appeared to reflect for a few moments; and then she said, "Let it be to Bloomfield. Delightful is the scenery in that district: the mansion itself is secluded—there are beautiful walks through avenues and lanes embowered with verdure at this season of the year—the air is fresh and revivifying—and we may there hope to regain a healthier tone for our mind and spirits."

"In all this I agree with you, Ethel," responded the young Earl. "We will depart to-day—or," he added, as a sudden thought struck him, "to-morrow at all events."

"And why not to-day?" inquired Ethel hastily.

"Because it is possible," responded Adolphus, "that my presence may be required at the Coroner's inquest upon the murderer and suicide Makepeace. But I will repair at once and ascertain. Meanwhile you can be making all our preparations for departure."

They then issued from the library,—the Countess repairing to her own

chamber, and Adolphus proceeding to the station-house to learn such particulars as he needed relative to the inquest. He was informed that from a communication just received from the Coroner, his presence would not be required; the confession of the deceased fully cleared up the mystery of the murder, apart from all other evidence; and in respect to the deed of self-destruction, there was little to be said on the subject—for all was clear and apparent. Adolphus accordingly returned to the mansion; and at two o'clock in the afternoon he took his departure thence, in company with Ethel.

The Bloomfield estate, which had long been in the Lascelles family, was about thirty miles from London; and, as Ethel had already briefly described, it was composed of some of the most beautiful scenery to be found in the country where it was situated. Adolphus had brought with him only one valet—Ethel only one maid: for there were sufficient domestics of all purposes invariably kept at Bloomfield. The arrival of the young Earl and of the widowed Countess—who was of course believed to be his mother-in-law—was heralded by a messenger sent off on horseback an hour before they started from the metropolis; and notwithstanding the notice was so short, everything was ready for their suitable reception. The same messenger communicated to the household at Bloomfield the intelligence of Makepeace's detection and suicide; and he whispered likewise the exposure which had been made of the amour of Adolphus and Ethel. The servants who listened to these tidings, were naturally stricken with astonishment: but it was not their interest to exhibit any other feeling than one of welcome to their master and the Countess, when they alighted from the carriage which drew up in front of that beautiful country-seat.

During the journey from London Ethel had not spoken one word relative to marriage: she had given Adolphus to understand that she would submit to his will in all things, with the exception however that she craved some little respite ere she again abandoned herself to him as his mistress. She represented that her husband had only died so recently and had perished so horribly—that so many frightful things had occurred—that her feelings had been so

harrowed—that her health had suffered so greatly—and that she stood so much in need of repose and rest,—that she felt convinced he would exact from her nothing more than the demeanour of friendship for the present. He, on his side, was only too glad to conciliate her in any way, and to allow her to follow her own inclinations, not to yield an assent: he nevertheless feigned to grant with reluctance, and to be impatient for the time when all the guilty past should be resuscitated so far as their illicit amour was concerned.

They arrived at Bloomfield, and took possession of the separate suite of chambers prepared for them; but they had their meals together—they passed the day together in-doors, or in rambling through the grounds;—and thus a week went by. During this interval they received a letter from Isabella, whom the intelligence had in the meantime reached that the guilt of Makepeace was discovered and that the wretched man had himself committed suicide. Miss Vincent wrote the fullest details in respect to all that had occurred to herself,—thus accounting for her sudden disappearance from the Gardiners' farm. She did not omit to mention that she had accidentally encountered Christian Ashton at Verner House—nor how he had delivered her from prisonage in the secret chamber. She intimated that it was her purpose to accept the kind invitation of Sir Edgar Beverley and Miss Hall to remain at Verner House until their marriage, which was shortly to take place;—and the whole tenour of her letter was kind and affectionate—for she felt that in some strange and unaccountable way she had done her aunt Ethel and her cousin Adolphus an immense injustice by believing that the crime of the old Earl's murder rested between them. As for Adolphus and Ethel themselves, they had too much to think of on their own account to pay any particular attention to the fact of Isabella having fallen in with Christian: and brief was the comment which Adolphus made upon the subject.

"Now that we have agreed," he said, "to bid defiance to the world and set its opinion at naught—and now too, dearest Ethel, that you are improving in health and spirits, and the time must be never at hand when you will throw yourself into my arms again,—it were all the better that Isabella should find

a home elsewhere. Let her marry young Ashton: we will make them a handsome allowance; and at the same time that we thus rid ourselves of Isabella, we shall be performing all our duty towards her."

Ethel assented; and the subject at once dropped.

After breakfast one morning—when Adolphus and the Countess had been about a week at Bloomfield—she said to the young Earl, with smiling countenance and caressing look, "You are indeed most kind to devote so much of your time to me—I may say *all* your time!"

"You see, Ethel," he answered, "that I study my best to ensure your happiness. But when will you be altogether mine again?"—for he was anxious to rivet as soon as possible the bonds which held them together; though at the same time careful to avoid the appearance of tyrannizing over her actions or in any way forcing her inclinations.

"Soon, dearest Adolphus," she responded, inclining her head upon his shoulder: "soon!—for you are becoming dear to me again—yes very dear!"

"Is it indeed so, Ethel?" he exclaimed, with a gush of feeling that might very well have been taken for the real joy of love itself—whereas it was only the satisfaction of hope at the idea that she would soon be so completely his slave again as to be beyond the reach of any latent inclination that might still exist to proclaim the whole truth to the world according to her proposition a week back at the mansion in the suburbs of London.

"Yes—dearest Adolphus," she responded, still suffering her head to recline upon his shoulder, "I love you—and, when you will," she murmuringly added, "I will be your's again—your's wholly!"

Adolphus encircled the lady's slender waist with his arm—drew her face towards him—and imprinted kisses upon it. Whether it were indeed the country air, together with the unusual amount of walking exercise which she had lately taken—or through an altered state of the mind—or from all these causes united, we cannot say; but certain it is that her appearance was considerably improved during the week that she had already passed at Bloomfield. Still the traces of recent care were perceptible

upon her cheeks: her form too was more slender than it was wont to be in the voluptuous symmetry of its proportions: nevertheless there was still the soft lustre in her large clear blue eyes,—still the pearly whiteness of the teeth shining between the parting roses of the lips—still the bright glory of the rich auburn hair. And as Adolphus thus drew her towards him, he felt something like a feeling of tenderness returning,—until slowly into his mind came back the recollection of the bitterness of all these altercations which had taken place between them; and in the presence of these recollections the softer feelings gradually disappeared, as twilight recedes when the shades of night come on.

But not by his countenance did he exhibit the change that was thus taking place in his mind: there was a smile upon his features, while bitterness was arising in his heart; for, as the reader comprehends, it was his interest, and therefore his purpose, to play a deep game—to assume everything that was conciliatory—to simulate affection—and to veil every thought that might shock or give offence. And Ethel herself had now one arm thrown over his shoulder; and as he was seated, and she was standing by him, or rather half-reclining in his arms, she looked down into his countenance. There was a smile upon her features likewise: her eyes appeared fraught with a reviving tenderness; and Adolphus said within himself, “Yes—truly she loves me well again!”

“We will go forth to walk,” said the Countess: “the weather is beautiful—the air is delicious—and there is that wild part of the estate, you know, my dear Adolphus, which we have not yet visited since we were down here, but which is so picturesque.”

“You mean the Maiden’s Bridge?” said the young Earl.

“Yes,” exclaimed Ethel: and instantaneously disengaging herself from his arms, she hurried towards the door,—adding, “I will put on my bonnet and scarf in a moment, and be with you.”

In a few minutes they were walking forth together,—the young widow leaning upon the arm of the young nobleman. There was a heightened colour upon her cheeks—a deeper roseate tinge than for some time past had displayed itself there; and her eyes

too appeared to shine with a happier lustre.

The weather was indeed beautiful—the sunbeams irradiated the entire landscape—but there was a breeze which prevented their extreme sultriness from being felt. The way of the rambles led first through the spacious park—then across the fields, in the direction of a wooded dell in the distance.

“Is there not some strange legend attached to the spot which we are about to visit?” inquired the Countess, as she walked by the side of Adolphus, leaning on his arm.

“To be sure!” he exclaimed: “did you never hear it? It is that legend which gives its name to the bridge.”

“No—I never heard it,” responded the Countess: and suddenly stooping down she plucked a wild-flower which grew by the side of the pathway. “What is that legend?” she inquired, tearing to pieces the floweret she had just culled.

There was something slightly wayward or peculiar in her manner, as it struck Adolphus for a moment: but attributing it to the return of a certain buoyancy of spirits with the change of scene and the fresh air of Bloomfield, he ceased to think of it.

“And so you never heard the legend of the Maiden’s Bridge?” he said. “And yet methinks this is not your first visit to Bloomfield?”

“No,” she responded: “I was here once before. It was with the late Earl,” she added softly; “and then for so short a time that though I paid a hurried visit to all these scenes of interest, yet I had not leisure to inquire particularly about them. Besides,” she exclaimed, in a gayer tone, “to listen to legends of this sort, one must have a companion who can tell them pleasantly or pathetically, as the case may be.”

Adolphus was charmed at this rapidly altering manner of the Countess: for never since her husband’s death had she seemed so gay as on the present occasion and he therefore felt convinced that within a very brief space of time she would abandon herself completely to him again. Besides, with this return of good spirits, there was all the less chance that she would relapse into the dark sombre mood that would prompt her to demand the sacrifice of himself.

“After so pretty a compliment to my powers as a legend-teller,” he said,

advanced till she gained the middle of the bridge. There she stopped short; and looking over the rail, contemplated the foaming water which was flashing brightly in the sunbeams. "Perhaps it was here, Adolphus," she at length said, turning towards her companion,—"here, upon this very spot, that the catastrophe took place?"

"Yes—the legend says," he answered, "that it was in the middle of the bridge, according to the tale which the shepherd subsequently told."

"And here, then, they fell over," said Ethel, "the girl's arms tightly clasped around the neck of him who was the ruin of her happiness?"

"Yes—here," rejoined the young Earl, turning round at the same time, as the Countess had done, to contemplate the water from the side which was unprotected by the hand-rail.

"Forgive me, Adolphus!" suddenly exclaimed Ethel.

At the same instant her arms were thrown about his neck: tightly were they clasped—a wild and fearful cry thrilled forth from his lips—one desperate struggle to disengage himself—but all in vain!—over they fell—down, down they went! The entire ravine, the grove, and all the adjacent district echoed with the terrific cries of the young lord: but not another sound than the words "*Forgive me, Adolphus!*" which she had uttered, came from the lips of Ethel. There was a terrific splash; and away their bodies were borne, the arms of the Countess still tight around his neck—her hands clasped—as if those arms and hands of her's constituted an iron vice!

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE GRAVE-STONE.

THE reader will not have forgotten that beautiful little village in Westmoreland where Barney the Barker obtained the situation of assistant grave-digger to old Jonathan Carnabie. To this village we must now return.

It was an early hour in the morning: and a female, clad in gipsy-like apparel, stood in the middle of the churchyard, contemplating that gravestone which bore the simple inscription of *October, 1830.* There was nothing wild in her

look now—nothing wandering nor restless: it was fixed and replete with sadness. For several minutes did she thus stand gazing upon that head-stone, as if the singular conciseness of the inscription thus riveted her attention—or else as if there were something in the date which more or less associated itself with certain memories floating in her brain.

The reader of course recognises Crazy Jane; and it is therefore useless to observe any mystery upon the point. The woman had intervals which, if not positively lucid, were at all events characterized by a certain clearness of perception in comparison with other periods; as, for instance, when she gave the information which led to so startling a turn in the trial of Lettice Rodger. The present occasion was one of the happier moods of her intellect, as she stood gazing upon the tombstone; and if an observer had been nigh, he might probably have perceived that beneath that fixity of look and mournful calmness of countenance, there was a certain inward agitation or excitement, arising from the powerful efforts and the straining attempts which the poor woman was making to disentangle her thoughts completely and marshal all her mental associations for the purpose of clear and intelligible review.

"He spoke of a poor and lady," she presently said in a murmuring tone to herself; "and *who* was likely to have been driven mad if not my poor dear mistress? That date—but, Ah! my ideas grow confused again—No, no! I cannot rightly understand that which it appears as if I seek and want to comprehend!"

She turned away slowly and mournfully; and just at that instant old Jonathan Carnabie and his new assistant were advancing towards the gate of the churchyard.

"Ah!" she ejaculated, "there are the men whom I seek!—they were together the other night when they said something which struck me so strangely!"

"Here is this poor crazy creature again," said old Jonathan. "I wonder why she is hanging about the village. We must find out where she belongs! and have her passed to her parish: it will never do for her to become chargeable to our local rates."

"You are the man, Mr. Carnabie," said the Barker, "to get rid of her. Go and try your eloquence. There! blow me if I haven't forgot the nutlock—and I'll just run and fetch it."

"Do," responded the old sexton: and he advanced towards Crazy Jane, who, being at a distance of about fifty yards, had not overheard a single syllable that passed between the sexton and his assistant.

Meanwhile the Barker, turning rapidly away, had sped back to the cottage.

"My poor woman," said Jonathan, accosting Crazy Jane, "you seem to be a houseless wanderer——"

"A wanderer?—yes!" she ejaculated: "because it is my destiny! My mind will not let me rest. Houseless did you say? No—not when I choose to ask for an asylum: for who would refuse it to a poor creature such as I am? Besides," she added, after a pause, "I can pay for what I have when payment is required."

Thus speaking, she dived her lank hand down into a pocket, and drew forth a quantity of coin. Silver and halfpence were all jumbled together; and it struck the old sexton that he caught the glitter of two or three pieces of a still more precious metal. But the next instant Crazy Jane had transferred the money back to her pocket,—exclaimed with a sort of triumph, "So you see that I am not altogether a mendicant, though you perhaps took me for one?"

"I am well pleased, my poor woman," answered Jonathan, "to find that you are thus independent of casual charity. But why are you not with your friends?—for to possess money argues to a certain extent the possession of friends——"

"Yes,—yes—I have friends," ejaculated Crazy Jane,—"friends who sought to do everything for me: but no!—my wandering spirit would not suffer me to stay where they placed me. Do you know, old man," she added, advancing close up to him, and speaking in a low voice, as well as with a certain mysterious significance of look,—“do you know that if ever I remain long in one place, something whispers in my ear that I must go forth on my travels again—for that there is something which I seek—and that something I must find!”

"And what is this something which you seek?" asked the old sexton in a

gentle voice; for he pitied the poor woman.

She had fallen into a deep reverie: she did not hear the question—or if she did, she chose not to answer it; and for upwards of a minute did silence thus prevail. At length suddenly raising her eyes, she fixed her looks upon the gravestone with the strangely brief inscription—and abruptly asked, "Who lies there?"

"A poor lady," responded the old Carnabie, "who died in this village under very distressing circumstances."

"Yes, yes—I remember! you said so the other night!" ejaculated Crazy Jane. "I heard you telling that man who was with you——But, oh! my memory is so bad!" and then she pressed her hand, as if with a sensation of pain, against her forehead.

"You told me on that night," continued Jonathan Carnabie, "that you wanted to ask me some questions. If you like to put them now, I will give you any information that lies in my power."

"That lady," said Crazy Jane, keeping her eyes still revolved upon the gravestone,—“was she not mad? did I not hear you say that it was a deep, silent, brooding madness? Yes, yes! those were the words!” cried the poor creature, with a sudden exultation at having recollected them.

"And what I said was the truth," answered Jonathan Carnabie. "It was a sad tale—and if I thought you could understand it, or follow my words while I tell it——"

"I shall understand it," interrupted Jane. "Yes—my mind is clearer now—my ideas are collected—I shall be able to listen to you. Proceed, before the cloud again comes over me."

"You see that stone bears the date of October, 1830," began the sexton: "but it was in the beginning of the same year—therefore a matter of eight months before that date—that as I was coming early one morning to open the church to ring the bells for a marriage which was to take place, I saw a female lying across one of the graves with her face downwards. I hastened towards her, and lifted her up. I thought she was dead—she was as pale as a corpse, and as cold as one too. But how beautiful!"

"Ah, beautiful indeed!" murmured Crazy Jane. "But go on—go on. Had she dark hair—long flowing dark hair?"

"In truth she had not at *that* time," replied the old sexton: "for her head had been closely shaved——"

"Oh, to cut off that beautiful, beautiful hair?" exclaimed the mad woman, clasping her hands and shaking herself as if in rage from head to foot.

"Did you know her, then?" asked old Jonathan eagerly: "is it possible that you knew her? or do you only suspect who she was?"

"No matter!" interrupted Crazy Jane impatiently. "Proceed, I tell you."

"Well," continued the sexton, glancing at his singular companion's countenance in order to assure himself, so far as he could judge, that she was in a suitable frame of mind to hear what he had to say, and therefore to render it worth while for him to proceed,—"*I* went and picked up the lady, as I have just told you for a lady she was by every appearance, though her dress was much travel-soiled;—and I found that she was in a deep swoon. I bore her off to the parsonage, which you see close by. The rector and his family were all absent at the time, on a visit to some friends in Lancashire: there was no one but a female-servant in the house—but she did her best to recover the poor lady from her insensibility. When she opened her eyes——"

"And those eyes," ejaculated Crazy Jane eagerly, "were large and dark—bright, but sweetly expressive? Oh, methinks I see them now!" and the poor creature suddenly burst forth into an agony of convulsive sobs.

"Truly this woman must have known that lady well," thought Jonathan Carnaby to himself; and suffering a minute or two to elapse until Crazy Jane's paroxysm of grief was moderated, he said slowly and quietly, "Yes, to the best of my recollection the lady had large dark eyes: but as for their lustre, it was gone—and as for their sweetness of expression, it was lost in the dull vacancy of her gaze."

"Poor dear lady!" murmured Crazy Jane. "Oh, what must she have suffered! what must she have suffered! And *my* offerings—they have been as nothing in comparison! Do you mean, old man—do you mean that she was mad?"

"I do," answered Jonathan: then after a pause, he went on to say, "I was telling you that I conveyed her into the parsonage, where the servant-girl attended upon her; and though she came back to life, it could scarcely be called to consciousness—for the poor creature's mind seemed totally gone. She took no more notice of anything than a child of six months old. Stop!—I forgot! Yes, when the maid undressed her, there was a small velvet bag, sewn all round—a little bag not near so large as the palm of your hand—and it was fastened to a black ribbon round her neck. This, as the maid told me—for of course I was not present when the lady was undressed—she clutched with a sudden vehemence, crying out, 'No, no! you shall not take it from me!—The girl never meant to take the bag away; and therefore she at once told the poor lady not to be frightened on that score. This was the only thing she seemed to take any notice of; and when she found that the bag was safe, she relapsed into her dull dead apathetic condition, having no further regard for anything. A surgeon was sent for; and he said that the poor lady was utterly bereft of her senses—that her mind was a perfect void—that her reason was totally gone. Of course we all thought that as her head was shaved, she had escaped from some lunatic asylum, and that it would not therefore be very difficult to find out where she had come from. Nevertheless, she had evidently been walking far; for her shoes were worn right through—her stockings also—and the soles of her feet were cut and bleeding."

Here Crazy Jane gave a deep convulsive moan; and staggering against the grave-stone, with the concise inscription, she leant over it weeping bitterly. Several minutes thus elapsed, until she suddenly raised her countenance again; and then it wore a look so altered—so wild—that the old sexton felt convinced the poor creature was now no longer in a frame of mind to listen to his story. And she herself speedily made him aware that he was perfectly right.

"No more now!" she ejaculated: "not another word for the present! What you have said is impressed *here!*"—and she pointed vehemently three or four times to her forehead: "but my brain could bear no more!"—and there

was a maniac wildness in her eyes. "Oh, I have already heard too much—too much! Another time, old man, I will come back and hear what more you have to say. Ah! you took me for a beggar and a mendicant," she ejaculated, suddenly stopping short as she was just on the very point of coming away: then, diving her hand down into her pocket, she brought forth three or four shillings; and flinging them towards him, cried, "Go drink to the health of Crazy Jane!"

With these words she hurried away; and turning the angle of the church, was lost to the view of the old sexton, who stood gazing after her until she thus disappeared.

"She is a strange creature," he muttered to himself, as he stooped down and picked up the coins: "I hope she will keep her word and come back—for she evidently knows something about the poor lady. Or perhaps after all it may only be a portion of her madness? Yet it would be strange, though, that she should know the colour of her hair and eyes: for now that I bethink me, when the poor lady's hair did grow again, it was black. I wonder whether—but we shall see all in good time, no doubt. Crazy Jane is pretty sure to return. But where is that precious assistant of mine all this while?"

We will explain the real cause of the Burker's somewhat abrupt disappearance and prolonged absence, under the pretext of fetching a mattock from old Carnabie's cottage, thought he knew perfectly well that the implement had been left along with others, on the previous evening, inside the church-porch. The fact is, Mr. Barnes did not like the appearance of the mad woman. On the night that she had so suddenly presented herself to him and the sexton, he was smitten with a certain suspicion; and therefore he had taken very good care not to speak a single word, for fear his voice should be recognised. When she had fled so precipitately, he buoyed himself up with the hope that she would not return again into that neighbourhood—but that her steps, as wayward and unsettled as her own brain, would carry her elsewhere. Now therefore that she re-appeared in the same place, he was again seized with alarm; and yielding to that terror, had suddenly absented himself under the pretext which we have described. From the window of old Carnabie's cottage, he

watched the woman and the sexton as they stood in discourse together in the churchyard; and as he perceived by her manner and her gesticulations that she was much excited, he feared lest the conversation regarded himself; but when she so precipitately hurried off again, and the sexton stood in a musing manner for a few minutes, the Burker's courage revived.

"If it was me they was talking of," he said to himself, "they would have gone off at once to raise the whole willage and hnt me down like a mad dog."

The Burker thereupon issued forth from the cottage, and hastened to rejoin old Carnabie: but we will interrupt the progress of our narrative for a few moments, to depict the precise nature of the Burker's apprehensions.

He had of course read the newspaper-accounts of Lettice Rodney's trial at Liverpool; and beyond what we ourselves have recorded on that subject in our narrative, the journals had given several minute particulars in respect to the female who without being brought forward in court had nevertheless, through the medium of another species of deposition, given so important a turn to the proceedings. The caterers for the public press had described her as a poor wandering maniac who had for some years been known in the neighbourhood of Liverpool; they had delineated her personal appearance, and had added that she was usually known by the denomination of Crazy Jane. All these particulars had Barney the Burker read at the time, for they were transferred from the provincial to the London papers; and thus when the woman so suddenly appeared before old Carnabie and himself in Woodbridge churchyard, he had been smitten with the apprehension that she was the person whose testimony, presented in writing to the Court, had led to the acquittal of Lettice Rodney, the incarceration of Mrs. Webber, and the subsequent arrest of himself. Still the Burker was not completely sure that this woman who now haunted the neighbourhood of Woodbridge, was in reality Crazy Jane—though he had certainly little doubt on the subject.

He rejoined the old sexton, as we have already said; and a furtive look, hastily flung upon Carnabie's countenance, convinced the miscreant that

nothing disagreeable or threatening had transpired in reference to himself.

"Well, where is the mattock?" asked Jonathan, somewhat surlily: "and what made you such a long time in looking for it?"

"It was just because I could not find it that I stayed so long," answered the Barker, "and now I recollect, it's along with t'other things in the porch yonder. But you've had that poor mad creature's chattering away with you at a galleys' rate!"

"I can't rightly make her out," responded the sexton: "she is as demented as one can be in some respects—and yet she seems as if she had a sort of lucidity on one subject."

"And what's that?" inquired the Barker, as if with an air of indifference.

"Why, about the poor lady that is buried here," replied Jonathan, pointing to the grave headed by the stone with the concise inscription. "It appears as if she knew that lady; and so I was telling her the sad romantic story—which, by the bye, I promised to narrate to you one of these days——"

"Well, but she bolted away again like mad," interjected the Barker.

"Like mad, as she assuredly is!" rejoined the sexton. "I was only half through the story—she got much excited—said she would come back another day—and hurried off precipitately."

"I thought you meant to persuade her to get out of the parish altogether," observed Barnes, "as you wouldn't have no wagrants and waggabone mendicants here?"

"A vagrant she may be, poor creature!" said Jonathan, in a compassionate tone—"and a vagabond too for that matter; for the terms merely mean a wanderer without a settled home: but a mendicant she is not. She has plenty of money——"

"Plenty of money, eh?" said the Barker. "Where the deuce could she get it from?"

"That she did not tell me," answered Jonathan: "but she threw me a—a—six pence—telling me to drink her health; and so you and I will have a drop of beer presently, when we have finished our morning's work."

"It must have been a sixpence in halfpence though," thought the Barker to himself; "for I saw you stoop several times, old feller, to pick the coins up;

and I'll be bound it was handful of silver—or else how should you know she had plenty of money?"—but Barnes only thus mused inwardly and did not give audible expression to his thoughts; for he was particularly careful not to excite in any way the suspicions of the sexton.

"Yes," continued Jonathan, perfectly unconscious of what was passing in the mind of his assistant, "she has got a pocket well-filled with coin; and how I bethink me, she said I was to drink the health of Crazy Jane!"

"What a nice name to call herself by!" observed Barney: but as he averted his countenance for an instant, its expression was ghastly—for the mention of that name had dissipated whatsoever little doubt there was in his mind, and had confirmed all his worst fears. "And so she's coming back again—is she?" he inquired.

"She says so—and I have no doubt she will," responded the sexton. "She has got something into her head about the poor lady that lies buried there; and I know enough of these crazy people to be aware that when once they do get hold of a particular crotchet, they always stick to it. She is as certain to come back as that you and I am here."

"Poor creature!" said the Barker, affecting a tone of sympathy, although at the same instant he resolved upon the destruction of either the sexton or Crazy Jane—and perhaps of both.

"Though you are such a strange looking fellow," said old Carnible, "you have got a good heart—that is quite clear. One must not always go by the looks."

"I should rather think not!" ejaculated the Barker, as he walked on by the sexton's side.

The two men proceeded to the accomplishment of the work they had in hand: but all the while the Barker was employed in digging a grave for some recently deceased villager, he was deliberating with himself upon the mode of executing the hideous purpose he now entertained. The toil continued till mid-day—at which hour Jonathan returned to his cottage; while the Barker proceeded to the public-house to fetch as much beer as might be purchased with the sixpence which Jonathan gave him, and which he represented as the extent of Crazy Jane's gratuity. After

dinner the old sexton had some business to transact in the village; and the Barker's time was now at his own disposal. He repaired to the churchyard, so that in case Jonathan should return earlier than he had intimated, he might at once be found;—and lighting his pipe, he threw himself on the grass in the shade of a high tombstone; for the day was exceedingly sultry, and the sunbeams poured down with all their unclouded torrid strength. Flinging off his hat, the Barker covered his head with an old cotton handkerchief, and thus made himself as comfortable as possible, while enjoying his pipe and giving way to his reflections.

It will be necessary to observe that since the Barker had been in Jonathan Carnabie's service, he had occupied a little outhouse—or we might rather say a shed, attached to the sexton's cottage, and in which a truckle bedstead had been placed for his accommodation. Mr. Barnes was soon in a condition to judge by Jonathan's habits that he was economical and saving: and he more than suspected that the old man had a little hoard in his cottage. Already had the idea flitted across his brain that if he could acquire a positive certainty on the point, he would help himself to the treasure—for treasure it would prove to him, no matter how small the amount,—and he might then betake himself to another district, or else get out of the country altogether. Now therefore that the Barker's alarm was excited in respect to the appearance of Crazy Jane in the neighbourhood of the village of Woodbridge, he was resolved to achieve that crime of which he had hitherto but vaguely and dimly thought. But if he could also possess himself of Crazy Jane's money, it would be an addition to the store he anticipated to derive from the other quarter; and the Barker was not a man to stick at a couple of crimes—no, nor a dozen either—if he could only thereby improve his present depressed condition.

While thus reflecting, and utterly unsuspecting of the possibility of being overheard, Barney began to give audible expression to his thoughts.

"Yes," he said, while leisurely smoking his pipe, "Woodbridge is getting a precious sight too hot to hold such a popular gen'lman as myself; and I must take my precious carcass off

to another part of the world. That old scoundrel Carnabie is warm—I know he is; and I'll ferret out his hoard before I am a night older. If so be he wakes up—well then, there's the mattock, or the spade, or the crow-bar as will denuded soon cook his goose for him. And then that accursed she-devil Crazy Jane, which spoiled all the hash at Liverpool—I shall like to give her a topper on the head—and by jingo, I'll do it too!"

Having come to this most comforting conclusion, the Barker re-filled his pipe; and a person who had been standing behind a tombstone, glided noiselessly away over the long grass. That person was Crazy Jane. After a few hours' interval since her discourse with Carnabie, she had returned to the churchyard in a lucid state of mind again, and in the hope of finding him that he might finish his narrative relative to the unknown lady who slept beneath the turf for which he had evinced so much care, unrecompensed and unrewarded, throughout so many years. But while wandering amidst the tombstones in the hope of finding Carnabie, Crazy Jane had caught a glimpse of the Barker's form; and at once recognising him as the man whom she had seen with Jonathan, she thought of inquiring where the sexton himself was? She had approached noiselessly and unperceived, though she had not at first studied this degree of caution: just as she was about to address him, he began to speak; and his voice struck her with an effect as if a heavy blow had been dealt her. She knew it at once: it was that of the man whom she had heard conversing with Mrs. Webber at the back gate of Polard's house at Liverpool, on the night when the murder of that unfortunate gentleman was accomplished. Crazy Jane glided behind the tombstone, and listened in dumb horror to the words of unmistakable menace that issued from the villain's lips. When he had ceased speaking, she glided away, as already stated; and this time she *did* study to pursue her path as noiselessly as possible.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

WOODBIDGE.

It was eight o'clock in the evening, when a post-chaise drove into the little village of woodbridge, and stopped at the inn. A single traveller alighted—and this was Mr. Redcliffe.

In answer to the inquiries of the landlord, he stated that he might remain a day or two in that place; and he nodded an assent to the proposal that refreshments should be at once served up. These however he scarcely touched, and presently strolled forth to woo the gentle breeze of the evening, and perhaps to seek some solitude where for a while he might be alone with his own thoughts. He had certain inquiries to make in this neighbourhood; but he postponed them until the morrow—for his reflections during the day's travelling had, as was indeed often the case with the unhappy gentleman, excited his feelings to the extremest degree of tension.

His steps took him towards the churchyard; it was now a little past nine o'clock—the evening was beautifully clear—and slowly did Mr. Redcliffe pursue his way through the cemetery, contemplating the grave-stones. Presently his eyes settled upon that particular one which has been so often mentioned, and which bore the inscription of *October, 1830*. Jonathan Carnaby's care had recently blackened the indented letters forming this inscription; so that it was plainly visible on the gleaming white surface of the stone. Mr. Redcliffe was naturally struck by the singular brevity of this graven memorial of the buried dead; and the date too appeared to give a thrilling keenness to the memories that were floating in his mind.

"Singular epitaph!" he said in an audible tone: "wherefore the absence of any name to indicate to the passerby who reposes beneath? Was it that the dead who lies here, was, when living, so stained with crime that surviving relatives, though bestowing the right of solemn obsequies, yet dared not perpetuate a name that guilt had rendered infamous? And yet it can scarcely be so: for if it were, the remains of this unnamed one would scarcely have found sepulture in consecrated ground!"

At that instant Mr. Redcliffe became aware of a human form approaching along the walk intersecting the churchyard: he saw that it was the form of a woman—and a second glance made him start and ejaculate, "Ah! *one* of the objects of my search!"

"Mr. Redcliffe," said Crazy Jane—for she indeed it was—and she presented herself with no greeting of courtesy, nor with any apology for her abrupt and secret withdrawal from the asylum which he had provided for her after the trial of Lettice Rodney,—"*Mr. Redcliffe, there lies the one concerning whom you have twice or thrice spoken to me!*"

Crazy Jane pointed with her lank arm to the grave; and Redcliffe, hastily turning aside, concealed from the woman's view the unutterable emotions which had suddenly found silent but eloquent expression in his countenance.

"Then she is dead!" he at length lowly murmured to himself; but the woman heard not what he said. "How know you," he inquired, after another pause of nearly a minute,—"*how know you that she lies here?*"

"You yourself shall know it from the same source whence I learnt it," answered Jane "O Mr. Redcliffe! I am not mad at this moment. No, no!—never, never for long years have I understood myself so well as at this instant!—no, not even when telling all I knew to the magistrates and yourself in respect to the horrible murder at Liverpool! I heard things this morning," she continued, slowly and gravely, and in a perfectly collected manner, "which have made me reflect in a way that I have not reflected before for a long, long time. A change has taken place within me. I feel it *here*," she said, placing her hand upon her brow; "and I feel it *here*, too," she added, placing her hand upon her heart.

"I am rejoiced to hear you thus speak, Jane!" replied Redcliffe; but though he spoke of joy, there was nevertheless a deep sadness in his tone,—a sadness infused from the fountains of his heart.

"Yes, sir," proceeded the woman, "I felt that I had a mission to accomplish, crazed though I were—a mission to discover the fate of my beloved mistress; and at the very time when methought my footsteps were most

wayward, heaven itself was guiding them towards the spot where the mystery was to be solved!"

"But, Oh! how is this mystery solved?" asked Redcliffe, in a voice where pathos, and anguish, and suspense were so commingled that they seemed to give to his accents a new tone, and at the same time the mournful workings of his countenance expressed such kindred feelings that they appeared to give it a new aspect.

Jane started as if something had suddenly galvanized her—as if some long slumbering memory of the past was now all in an instant awakened; and with a species of dismayed suspense, strangely blended with a wondering joy that dared not have faith in the source of its own existence, her eyes were fixed keenly and searchingly upon him.

"Good heavens!" she ejaculated, "is it possible? Oh! what wild ideas are these?—ideas of the long lost—yea, even of the dead——"

"Hush, Jane—hush!" said Mr. Redcliffe: "for heaven's sake hush! I see that you know me!"

"Yes—as if by an inspiration!" exclaimed the woman, her eyes brightening vividly with the very feeling which she had just expressed. "But tell me—Oh! tell me," she instantaneously ejaculated, as another reminiscence flashed forcibly to her mind,—“you did not—no, you did not——”

"Hush, Jane! I know what you mean," interrupted Redcliffe. "No!—that heaven above which smiles upon us in its star-lit beauty, can attest——"

"Enough, enough!" murmured Jane: "I believe you—Oh, I believe you!"—and sinking down at his feet, she embraced his knees, sobbing with a variety of conflicting feelings, but amidst which a still wondering joy was the principal.

"Rise, my poor woman," said Mr. Redcliffe, so profoundly affected that the tears were streaming down his cheeks: "rise, I say faithful—Oh, too faithful Jane!—so faithful to the memory of your beloved mistress that your reason has reeled and tottered, and been well-nigh wrecked utterly! Rise: it is not to me that you must kneel—But we should both kneel—and here too!" he added, pointing towards the nameless grave.

"I have been kneeling there this evening," answered Jane: "I have watered that turf with my tears, for I know whose remains lie beneath! And I invoked the sainted spirit of my beloved mistress—for a saint in heaven I know she must be!—I invoked her sainted spirit, I say to intercede at the throne of Eternal Grace that my reason might be given back to me—and a soft voice seemed to whisper in my ear that the prayer was heard and that the boon I craved was granted! Then I arose from over the turf of that grave; and I was departing, when I beheld the form of some one stop here to contemplate the stone. I beheld you stand awhile on this spot—I marvelled who he could be that thus shared with me the deep, deep interest I feel in this grave: I approached—I recognised you."

"And now will you tell me, Jane," asked Mr. Redcliffe, who had listened with profoundest emotions to her statement—"will you tell me whence you learnt sufficient to convince you——"

"Mr. Redcliffe—for by that name will I still call you," interrupted Jane, a sudden reminiscence striking her—"there is this night a human life to be saved—and he who shall be thus saved, will tell you all! My knowledge of everything is but yet partial; the tale to which I listened remains unfinished——"

"And this life that is to be saved?" said Mr. Redcliffe, apprehending for a moment that the poor creature's intellect was wandering again: and he gazed upon her anxiously to see if his alarming surmise was well founded.

"No, no!" she exclaimed, penetrating what was passing in his mind; my reason errs not again! It is as I assure you. In that cottage dwells the sexton, who can tell you the tale of this perished one's hapless fate; and his life is in danger—for the miscreant who did the deed at Liverpool, is in the neighbourhood—he is there!"

"What!" ejaculated Redcliffe: "Barnes—the murderer of Pollard—the man who escaped from gaol——"

"He is there!" responded Jane, pointing towards the cottage; "and he contemplates another crime. I was determined to frustrate it:—that very instant when I encountered you, was I about to repair to the village and invoke the aid of persons there to capture the murderer. I had been thinking for

hours how I should best prevent the new crime and hand over the perpetrator of the old one to justice: for I feared—alas! I feared that whatsoever I might say would be taken only as the ravings of a poor crazed creature!”

“We will at once adopt measures!” ejaculated Redcliffe. “Come with me! Henceforth you must not be a wanderer! Come—But first of all one instant’s devotion *here!*”

Thus speaking, he threw himself upon his knees by the side of the grave of the unnamed one: he bent over the turf—he covered his face with his hands—and Jane, who stood at a short distance, could hear the convulsive sobs that came from his troubled breast. When he slowly arose from his suppliant posture, his countenance, as the moonlight fell upon it, was ghastly pale: but yet it was not convulsed—it now wore the expression of a deep, serene, resigned mournfulness.

He and Jane, issuing from the churchyard, proceeded together in the direction of the village; and while walking thither, Mr. Redcliffe asked, “Wherefore did you leave that asylum which I provided for you, and where the people, though in humble circumstances, were so kind and good to you?”

“Have I not said, Mr. Redcliffe,” responded his companion, “that I felt there was a mission to be fulfilled—and that by me it must be accomplished? I knew that if I asked permission to leave that home which you provided for me, it would be refused; I therefore stole away, taking with me the contents of the purse you so generously left me. And then, on becoming a wanderer again, I procured for myself the mean apparel which became a wanderer’s condition—”

“Enough, enough, Jane!” interrupted Mr. Redcliffe. “I was wrong to question you on the subject: I should have comprehended how your unwearying devotion to the memory of your beloved mistress would have thus rendered you a wanderer until you had ascertained her fate. And I too have been a wanderer!” said Mr. Redcliffe, —“a wanderer for the same object—but latterly to seek for you likewise, since I learnt your sudden flight from the cottage near Liverpool. It was not accident—it was heaven itself that brought me to this secluded village, that I might meet with you, and through you

learn the solution of that sad and long-enduring mystery!”

They now entered the village; and the landlord of the little inn was astonished when he beheld his new guest returning in the company of that strange and gipsy-like woman. But Mr. Redcliffe, at once making him an imperative sign to ask no questions said, ‘Let your wife take charge of this female, and surround her with all possible attentions. Let suitable apparel be provided for her—treat her as you would treat a guest who flourished a well filled purse before your eyes—but beware how you or any one belonging to you question her impertinently!’

The landlord bowed—and at once summoned his wife, whom Jane accompanied with the docile obedience of complete lucidity, as well as of a heart full of gratitude towards the author of this renewed kindness on her behalf.

“Now,” said Mr. Redcliffe, “a word with you, landlord!”—and he beckoned the man into the parlour which he was occupying at the inn. Have you the courage to accompany me,” he inquired, “on a venture that will put one hundred pounds in your pocket?”

The landlord—who was a stout, powerfully built man, of about forty years of age—opened his eyes wide with astonishment; and then said, “A hundred pounds, sir? I have courage to do anything for such a reward.”

“Then come with me,” answered Redcliffe. “Procure a stout cord—breathe not a syllable to your wife—and the money will be yours. I will explain myself fully as we proceed.”

But the landlord stood hesitating: he did not exactly know whether to believe that it was all right and straightforward or whether it were some lawless adventure into which his guest sought to drag him.

“A felon has escaped from the hands of justice,” said Mr. Redcliffe quickly; “the Government has offered fifty pounds for his apprehension—the authorities of Liverpool a like sum—and all this reward shall be yours! Now will you accompany me?”

“Cheerfully, sir,” answered the landlord, his hesitation vanishing in a moment: “and I beg your pardon—”

“Enough!” interrupted Mr. Redcliffe, “Procure the cord—conceal it about your person—and follow me without delay. I shall walk slowly

through the village in the direction of the churchyard."

"But would it not be better, sir," inquired the landlord, "to take pistols with us?"

"I have them," rejoined Mr. Redcliffe: and unlocking a mahogany case, he produced a pair of small double-barrelled rifle pistols, which he at once secured about his person.

He then issued forth from the room; and leaving the inn, proceeded slowly along the street. In a few minutes he was joined by the landlord, who intimated that he had with him a cord which would effectually bind the miscreant's limbs when he should be captured. He carried in his hand a stout staff or bludgeon: but Mr. Redcliffe said to him, "We must take the man alive: it is not for us to anticipate the blow which justice has to deal."

"And if in self-defence?" said the landlord.

"That is different," replied Mr. Redcliffe.

"And pray who may this man be sir?"

"You have heard of the dreadful murder at Liverpool several months back—you know probably that one of the assassins escaped——"

"What! the notorious Barney the Barker?" ejaculated the landlord.

"The very same," returned Redcliffe: "doubtless you have seen him too. Know you the assistant of our sexton here?"

"Well," exclaimed the landlord, stopping suddenly short, "if I didn't always say that the fellow had the most hang-dog countenance——"

"Come quick!" exclaimed Redcliffe: "or another murder may be committed ere our object be accomplished."

They walked on together; and on coming within view of the old sexton's cottage they perceived a light glimmering through one of the ground-floor windows. At that very instant the form of a man passed in front of that window, obscuring the light for a moment: and Redcliffe again said, "Come quick!"

The cottage stood in the midst of a little garden, separated by a low paling from the lane by which it was approached: the shed occupied by the Barker was in a yard at the back. The lane

itself was bounded by a hedge, which ceased at the commencement of the paling:—and there, within the shade of that hedge, Mr. Redcliffe and that landlord paused to reconnoitre the premises. Some one was knocking at the door with his knuckles: they had no doubt it was the same person whom they had seen passed by the window—they suspected it might be the Barker—but they could not be sure, for there was a little portico formed with trellis-work and covered with jasmine, in the deep shade of which stood the person who was thus knocking at the cottage door.

The Barker however it was; and we will for the present follow him and his proceedings. His coat was buttoned around him; and beneath it he had a crowbar concealed. The fellow had thought to do this murderous work thus early in the night—for it was little more than half-past-ten—in order that he might have many hours in which to place a considerable distance between himself and Woodbridge ere the foul deed should be discovered. As for Crazy Jane—if he found her not wandering in the neighbourhood after the accomplishment of the crime which he meditated, he would abandon his projects in respect to herself altogether, rather than waste valuable time and run additional risk by searching after her.

Barney the Barker knocked, as we have said, at Jonathan Carnabie's door. The old man was reading in his little parlour when the summons reached his ear; and taking up the light, he proceeded as far as the door—which he did not however open.

"Who is it?" he asked from within.

"It's me sir," replied the Barker; and his voice was heard by Mr. Redcliffe and the landlord—the latter of whom immediately recognising it (for he had on one occasion spoken to the man) intimated the same in a low hurried whisper to Mr. Redcliffe.

"Come," said this gentleman, also in a whispering tone, "let us creep stealthily along the paling:"—for he knew that if the fellow's suspicions were excited, he would at once turn and fly.

"And what do you want?" asked Jonathan Carnabie from within.

"There's a message just come down from the willage," responded the

Burker; "and the boy which brought it is a-waiting here to speak to you his-self."

"And how came you up at this hour?" inquired Jonathan, still without opening the door: not that the old man had any reason to suspect a sinister motive on the part of his assistant—but his long habit of self-seclusion, and perhaps the little circumstance that he really did possess a small hoard of gold, had rendered him particularly cautious.

"I didn't feel inclined to sleep," answered the Burker; "so I took a walk through the church-yard to make sure there was no body snatchers; and as I was a-coming back, I met this here little boy."

"All right!" answered Carnabie: and the door opening, the old man was discerned, carrying a candle in his hand.

The Burker at once pushed himself in: then there was a rush of footsteps immediately after him—the crow-bar dropped from beneath the coat which the miscreant, thus suddenly startled, had unbottomed in readiness; and in the twinkling of an eye a pistol was levelled at his head, while in his ear resounded, the terrible words, "surrender or you are a dead man!"

It was Mr. Redcliffe who had seized upon him with one hand, while with the other presented the weapon. The landlord—who was either confused by the suddenness of the proceeding, or else whose vaunted courage became paralysed in a moment at the sight of the ferocious countenance of the Burker—fumbled to produce the cord from beneath his garments: but though close at his loader's heels, he did not render prompt succour in securing the villain. With one terrific howl of rage the Burker burst from Mr. Redcliffe's grasp, at the same time dashing from his hand the pistol—which instantaneously exploded, without however accomplishing any mischief. The dilatory or dastard landlord was dashed violently to the ground, as the Burker sped past with the fury and power of a mad bull.

"Stop—or I fire! I have another pistol!" ejaculated Redcliffe, who had not been hurled down, but merely thrust violently against the door-post.

The Burker made no response—nor did he obey the mandate; but on he rushed with a speed that was almost incredible. Mr. Redcliffe pursued him,

calling the landlord to join in the chase. Without waiting to see whether he was obeyed, Mr. Redcliffe darted forward, at the same time drawing forth his remaining weapon, which he did not however immediately use. But finding that the assassin, goaded by his desperate circumstances, was fleeing more quickly than he was enabled to follow, he discharged one of the bullets of the double-barel pistol, with the aim and the intent wounding the ruffian in the leg. The ball missed; and on sped Birney. The second bullet was sent flying after him, this likewise failed. But all of a sudden the river revealed itself in its quick silver brightness to Mr. Redcliffe's view. He heard footsteps behind him—glance thrown over his shoulder, showing him that the landlord was following—and he exclaimed, "Quick, quick! he is in our power."

But the next moment the Burker plunged into the river. His dark form was seen for a moment struggling amidst the eddies which his leap had thus created; and then it disappeared from the view. A very little lower down, a row of trees skirted each bank overhanging the river so far as to shut out the clear starlight, and thus threw all that portion of the stream for a couple of hundred yards into the deepest, blackest gloom. Redcliffe and the landlord hurried along the bank straining their eyes to peep through the dense foliage and catch a glimpse if possible of the waters beneath—but all in vain. Neither heard they any sound like that of a struggling or battling form in those waters; and amidst that depth of gloom they ran to and fro along the bank within and beyond the range of the trees,—Redcliffe being ready at the first appearance of the Burker to spring in and grapple with him. But no farther trace was discovered of the murderer.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE FOUR SYRENS.

THE scene changes to the sumptuous establishment of Madame Angelique in London; and we must again introduce our readers to the apartment which communicated by means of the

mirror-contrived door with the Frenchman's house adjoining.

In this room we shall find four beautiful girls, as on the first occasion when the reader was initiated in the mysteries of this temple of voluptuousness: but of these present four, *two* were new importations to the Frenchwoman's house of fashionable infamy. Armantine, the French girl, was still there: Linda, the German girl, was likewise still an inmate of the same place:—the other to have yet to be described. All four were exquisitely dressed in evening toilet: their charms were displayed—we can scarcely say to the utmost advantage, for *this* implies a consistency with that modesty without which beauty loses half its fascination: but those lovely contours of bust were exposed in a manner that left but little more to be revealed. And as if too by that which was originally a study, but which had now become a habit, the attitudes of those four girls were full of a voluptuous abandonment: so that if they had been sitting to an artist who sought to depict four different personifications of luxurious sensuousness they could not possibly have chosen better positions—nor could better models have been selected.

"Yet there was nothing of the absolute grossness of the ordinary houses of infamy, nor of the manner of their inmates, discernible in that room nor on the part of those four young women. The furniture was all sumptuous—luxurious too, even to the carving out of oriental ideas of such luxury: but no immodest pictures were suspended to the walls—it might have been a room in any palatial mansion the respectability of which was above the breath of scandal. Besides, there was an elegance of taste and an air of refinement presiding over the entire appointments of the room: while the sideboard was covered with the choicest wines and the most delicate confectionery, as well as a variety of fruits—but there was no eager rushing on the part of the young females to the sideboard; and the tempting refreshments remained there comparatively unheeded,—thus evidencing that the inmates of the room were accustomed to these and all other luxuries.

"Then, as for the attitudes of the girls themselves, it is true that, as we have already said, they were replete

with a voluptuous abandonment, and the charms of those lovely creatures were most meretriciously displayed. Still, even here there was a gloss of refinement over all—an elegant polish which showed that they had all been ladies once, in the common acceptance of the term, whatever name they merited now. The good breeding which from their infancy was their's was discernible in their manners: there was nothing improper in their discourse—nor had their looks the bold hardihood of a gross and vulgar harlotry. For a scene of iniquity, it was certainly one of the most fascinating that could possibly be presented to the view; and certainly the best composed and the best appointed in all its details within the limits of the modern Babylon. But then Madame Angelique had ever taken great pride in what she was presumptuous enough to style the "respectability" of her establishment; and as she treated the young women like ladies, and enforced the same demeanour on the part of the female domestics towards them, they on their own part had a certain pride in maintaining a suitable decorum of conversation and manners amongst themselves.

We will now go a little more into detail. Linda, the German girl, was reclining upon an Ottoman, negligently toying with her fair tresses,—her naked arms and almost completely bared bosom exhibiting the stainless white of a lovely complexion. There was an unspeakable languor about her entire form; and her sensuous abandonment of attitude was displayed with all its most ravishingly dangerous characteristics. Armantine, the French girl with her dark glossy hair arranged in bands, and she herself perhaps the least meretriciously attired of the whole four—looking, too, more sweetly and pensively, lovely, though lovelier as to actual charms she was not, for it were impossible to award the palm to any one in particular,—Armantine, we say, was placed in a settee near the German girl, with whom she principally conversed.

In a large cushioned chair, languishingly reclined the third of these syrens,—a full-grown beauty, though still quite youthful, and with all the freshness of youth blooming upon her rich luxuriant charms. There was an air of sensuous

indolence about this girl which was different from that of the German: it was the waking dreaminess of a luxurious temperament that appeared to be softly abandoning itself to voluptuous reveries. She was a native of England; and had only recently passed from the keeping of a nobleman,—who first seduced her from a genteel and happy home,—into Madame Angelique's fashionable temple of infamy. But no remorse had she on account of the home she had left—or at least, if such a feeling were really in her bosom, she displayed it not: for blended with that air of sensuous lassitude—an air which might be described as luxurious wantonness at rest—was an expression of listless, placid contentment: She had light hair and blue eyes: milk and roses combined to form her complexion: she had full moist luscious lips—beautiful teeth—and a form which without being exuberant to fatness, was full, fleshy, but of perfectly symmetrical proportions. She answered to the Christian name of Marion.

Upon the back of the chair in which Marion thus negligently reclined—or rather, in which she reposed—leant a tall slender girl, of sylphid shape, and with such exquisite elegance and grace in all her attitudes and movements, that in the days of her virtue she must have been a veritable star in the midst of the brightest galaxy that ever thronged in a ball-room. She had brown hair, remarkably luxuriant in its mass of silken softness, and with a rich natural gloss upon it. Her features were perfectly faultless: her age did not exceed seventeen: she also was an English girl—and she bore the beautiful name of Eglantine. Alas, that one endowed with such loveliness of form and with such mental accomplishments as she possessed—bearing too a name so sweet to be murmured by the lips of pure, chaste, and honourable love—alas, that she should have fallen from virtue's pinnacle and sunk into this degradation, gilded though it were!

Linda, Armantine, Marion, and Eglantine were together in their sumptuous apartment, between nine and ten o'clock in the evening; and they were conversing on various topics, just as four ladies might do in their own drawing-room. Presently the mirror-contrived door opened: the four syrens turned their eyes slow to see who was

about to enter,—when an individual who was a stranger to them all, made his appearance. He was flashily dressed, but had a vulgar look; and as he took off his hat, he made a most ridiculous attempt at a bow to the young women: so that Armantine and Eglantine could not help laughing—while Linda and Marion so far exerted themselves in their luxurious indolence as to sit up and survey him with more attention,

"Good evening, ladies," said this individual, closing the mirror-door behind him, and advancing with an impudent leering smirk towards those whom he thus addressed. "Don't be alarmed. Perhaps you know me by name—and perhaps you don't. So if the old lady"—thus irreverently, as the girls thought, alluding to Madame Angelique—"hasn't done me the honour of mentioning me to you before, I may as well announce myself as Mr. Isaac Shadbolt. Honest like, as my friends Sir Richard Mayne and Colonel Rowan call me!"

"Why, I do believe," whispered Marion to her companions, "he alludes to the Commissioners of Police. When I lived with Lord Beltinge, I frequently heard those names mentioned."

"Well, yes, Miss," said Mr. Shadbolt, whose ears were uncommonly keen, and who had caught a portion of that whisper,—“the gentleman *are* the Commissioners of Police; and I have the honour to serve under them. Not one of your common vulgar policemen, you know—but a sort of subaltern—what an Ensign or Lieutenant is in a regiment in comparison with the Colonel.”

It was tolerably easy to perceive that Mr. Shadbolt had been drinking—not merely because his countenance was flushed, his speech was rather thick, and his gait a trifle unsteady—but likewise because the hitherto delicately perfumed atmosphere of the apartment had become impregnated, on this individual's entrance, with an odour of rum, as if he had dropped into two or three wine-vaults in his way, previous to making the present call.

"And pray what do you want, sir?" inquired Marion, now abandoning her voluptuous indolence as much as it was in her sensuously languishing nature to throw it off;—"what do you want?" she repeated: for having—

recently come from beneath aristocratic protection, she was the first to resent the vulgar intrusion.

"Did you ask me, Miss, what I would take to drink?" said Mr. Shadbolt, with police-court ease and station-house familiarity. "I have got a *detective* eye for whatever's good: trust honest Ike Shadbolt for *that*!"—and then he burst out into a loud guffaw at the witticism borrowed from his professional avocations, but the humour of which was lost to the young ladies, who were now all four full of indignation, surprise, and disgust.

Mr. Shadbolt however, nothing abashed, advanced towards the side-board, and deliberately filled a tumbler with claret—for it was the habit of this exceedingly independent gentleman scornfully to eschew small glasses: and having slowly poured the somewhat copious libation down his throat, he gave a long sigh of pleasure. Then, having thus refreshed himself internally, he relieved his amatory feelings by nodding with a familiar leer at Marion—blowing a kiss from the tips of his fingers to Linda—smirking at Armantine—and extending his arms invitingly towards Eglantine. The young ladies, however, relished these pantomimic displays as little as might be: and they exchanged amongst themselves fresh looks of indignation and disgust. Mr. Shadbolt only laughed; and now with a huge slice of cake in one hand, and a quarter of a pineapple in the other, he leant against the side-board feeding deliberately and still bestowing the glances of tender familiarity on the four houris.

"This is too disgusting!" said Marion. "Eglantine dear, you are nearest—ring the bell—hard! hard!"

"Do if you like," said Mr. Shadbolt: "but depend upon it the old dowager"—thus again irreverently alluding to Madame Angelique—"will give me a most welcome reception. Why, Lord love you all, you sweet creatures! how do you think I could be here in any possible way unless I was one of the privileged? And where is not honest Ike Shadbolt welcome, I should just like for to know?"

Miss Eglantine,—thinking there must be more or less truth in the man's words, having the term "police" still ringing ominously in her ear, and afraid of angering one who made himself as completely at home as if he had a

conscious right to do so,—forbore from pulling the bell; and whispered to Marion. "Had we not better see what he really wants? Perhaps he will explain himself? M. Bertin would scarcely have let him up unless he had full authority from madame."

"Come, sir," said Marion, authoritatively, "explain."

"An explanation of my conduct is quickly given, my dears," said Mr. Shadbolt; "and all the quicker too, since I see that with regular female curiosity you are all four burning to know what brings your humble servant and ever faithful admirer to this here saloon. There are several reasons. In the first place, I knew very well I should have the pleasure—or at least stand the chance, of meeting some of the sweetest young creatures in all England. In the second place, I knew that the claret was super-excellent and the port stunning: In the third place, I had an eye to the cake and fruit. And in the fourth place, my dears, I have a little private business of a very particular character with the amiable old dowager."

The girls could scarcely repress a smile at the consummate imprudence—the cool free-and-easy independence of Mr. Isaac Shadbolt; and even the proud Marion suffered her moist red lips to part sufficiently to reveal the brilliancy of her teeth. Mr. Shadbolt continued to leer familiarly at the syrens, while he demolished the cake and the pineapple; and then he helped himself to another tumbler full of wine.

"And now," he said, "that I've refreshed myself a bit, I should take it as civil if either of you young ladies would just show me where I shall find the old dowager."

"We will ring for a servant," said Eglantine, now once more extending her snowy, beautifully modelled arm towards the bell-pull.

"Stop, my dear!" exclaimed Mr. Shadbolt: "it is not worth while to trouble the slaveys—it would only throw the old lady into a flutter if we were to use so much ceremony, because she knows who I am. Just take the trouble to show me the way yourself; and if we do happen to pass through a dark passage together, I won't snatch a kiss—Oh, no! not I indeed!"—and then Mr. Shadbolt was lost for the next

half-minute in a series of nods, winks, and amatory leers.

Eglantine consulted Marion with a glance; and the latter said in a loud haughty tone, "This scene must positively end, my dear. Ring the bell, and have done with it."

"Perhaps I had better not," whispered Eglantine: "it might only annoy and frighten madame, as this man has already intimated:"—then hastening towards Shadbolt, she said, "Come—follow me."

The detective officer, bowing after his own free-and-easy fashion to the other three young ladies, accompanied Miss Eglantine,—who conducted him to Madame Angelique's boudoir, taking very good care however to keep sufficiently in advance so as to avoid any practical familiarity which Mr. Shadbolt might in his amatory playfulness think fit to exhibit. Madame Angelique was alone in her luxuriously furnished room: the detective-officer was introduced thither; and Eglantine fitted back to the saloon, to communicate to her companions how startled and dismayed the mistress of the establishment looked when Mr. Shadbolt entered the boudoir.

And such indeed was the case. A cold tremor swept through the form of the Frenchwoman, whose conscience for some time past had been so uneasy, and who constantly experienced a sensation as if some fearful calamity would suddenly explode storm-like upon her head. The detective bowed with the air of one who had no necessity to await a welcome greeting, but who felt that he exercised an influence, or indeed an authority, which would ensure him a most civil reception, no matter what the real feeling of the mistress of the house might be.

"Sit down, Mr. Shadbolt—pray be seated," said Madame Angelique, as soon as she had sufficiently recovered from the first shock of terror to be enabled to give utterance to a word; but still her limbs were all trembling, and her voice was full of a nervous trepidation. "I thought—I thought—that is, you led me to believe—that—that it would be a long, long time——"

"Before you saw my beautiful visage again?" added Mr. Shadbolt, with his wonted flippancy. "Well I believe, ma'am," he continued, as he leisurely smoothed down the ruffled nap of his

hat with coat-sleeve, "I did intimate something of the sort——"

"Yes—and you know" interjected Madame Angelique, eagerly, "I was to give you a hundred a-year—and I am sure, Mr. Shadbolt—but perhaps you have got bad news? perhaps something else has turned up?"

"Well, ma'am, I am sorry to say that such is the case," rejoined the officer. "There isn't a more delicate-minded man in all the world than honest Ike Shadbolt—or one who has more regard for a lady's feelings: I am as tender as a chicken in that respect—but there's persons higher in authority than even Ike Shadbolt,"

"I understand!" said Madame Angelique, with a shudder: "you mean the Commissioners of Police?"

Well, ma'am, I did just allude to those gentlemen," answered the detective. "Now, the long and short of the matter is they have received another intimation about your house——"

"Oh, Mr. Shadbolt!" cried the Frenchwoman, wringing her hands in despair; "I offered to wall up the unfortunate door—or give up my business in respect to the young ladies, and attend only to the millinery—or even—but you told me so positively that I need do nothing of the sort!"

"And I only told you ma'am," interrupted Shadbolt, "what I thought at the time. But circumstances may alter—and they *have* altered. Immediately after my former visit, I reported to the Commissioners that you had faithfully promised to do all you have just been saying; and they appeared satisfied. I thought that it would all end pleasantly—that you would leave the matter in my hands—and that as long as I made no additional report, they would take it for granted I was keeping a look-out on you, and you were doing all that was necessary. But behold you! this afternoon I was summoned to Scotland Yard—that's the office of the Commissioners, you know—and was desired to see how you were getting on, but without holding the slightest communication with you. Now don't flurry yourself, ma'am—you'll see I'm acting a friendly part towards you: but the truth is, the Commissioners have been in private communication with the parochial

authorities—and—and—these authorities are going to—to—prosecute you. So I'm come to get evidence——"

A half-stifled shriek came from the lips of the wretched Frenchwoman; and as she fell back in her chair as if she were about to go off in a fit, Mr. Shadbolt very considerably filled a glass with wine and held it to her lips: but as she only shook her head impatiently, and waved him off, he drank to himself,—coolly observing "that it was a pity it should be wasted."

"What, in the name of heaven, am I to do?" cried Madame Angelique, wringing her hands. "Do advise me, Mr. Shadbolt! You will find I shall be grateful! What am I to do? Shall I send off the young ladies at once? shall I shut up the house? I have already thought of all this—but——"

"Look here, ma'am" said the officer; be calm and cool—we will discuss the matter quietly and comfortably—and I dare say you can get out of the business pleasantly enough in the long run."

"Ah!" said Madame Angelique, with a long sigh of relief: "I thought you would not leave me to be sent to prison—to be ruined——"

"Not a bit of it!" ejaculated Shadbolt. "Answer me a question or two. I suppose you are pretty warm—I mean you have got plenty of money? and if you was to cut this business you wouldn't quite have to go into the work house? Come, ma'am—tell the truth," added the officer, seeing that she hesitated how to reply: "tell the truth, I say, if you want the advice of honest like Shadbolt."

"Well, then," responded the Frenchwoman, "I certainly could retire from business with a tolerable competency if I chose: and indeed I had some thoughts of doing so after your previous visit. Only——"

"Only what?" inquired Shadbolt.

"Only I fancied," added Madame Angelique, "that I was the object of such bitter persecution on the part of that lady at Bayswater whom you and I spoke about, that she would pursue me wherever I went—and that it therefore little mattered where I might be or what I did—for that it would always come to the same thing—I meant that I should ever have to stand on the defensive against her."

While Madame Angelique was thus speaking, Shadbolt passed his hand

slowly across his forehead with the air of one who was reflecting in a sort of half-bewilderment, and who was striving to collect his ideas.

"What lady at Bayswater?" he at length said.

"Did you not tell me the last time you were here" inquired Madame Angelique quickly, "that the information was given to the Commissioners by an Indian lady——"

"If I did then, I was drunk," interrupted Shadbolt. "Ah! by the bye, I do recollect now, that you pressed me upon the point. You had got some crotchet in your head; and perhaps I thought it best at the time to leave you in the dark—or more likely still, I was really in total ignorance myself——"

"Then it is not the Lady Indora who is persecuting me?" exclaimed the Frenchwoman eagerly.

"I don't believe the lady you speak of has anything to do in the business," interjected Shadbolt. "The truth is, a lawyer in Bedford Row, Holborn—one Coleman by name—but who has a private house in this parish, is at the bottom of the whole affair: and from all I can learn, he has addressed the Commissioners most seriously on the subject. Indeed, there's no use disguising the fact—he says he is employed for a wealthy client of his who also lives in the parish, but who chooses to keep in the back-ground."

"Mr. Coleman, a solicitor?" said Madame Angelique, musing reflectively: "I never heard of him. But then it is true gentlemen often come to my house under feigned names——"

"And gather a great many particulars," added Mr. Shadbolt significantly, "Now, you see, ma'am I am dealing candidly with you. The truth is, the Commissioners know that you are not very particular how you entice young girls away from their homes, or even have them carried off by force. They also know that a certain Lettice Rodney who was tried at Liverpool, belonged to your establishment——"

"Good heaven!" ejaculated Madame Angelique.

"They know too," continued Shadbolt, "that at the time when she got into all her troubles, she was going to Ireland on your business—to wheedle back a certain Eveleen O'Brien——"

"Then Lettice must have betrayed everything!" cried the Frenchwoman bitterly.

"I can't say who betrayed it," proceeded Shadbolt: "all I know is, that this is the information given to the Commissioners by Mr. Coleman the lawyer. But there's more still to come. It is known you have agents in different parts of the country to look out for young girls and pick them up for your customers who may themselves reside in the country. Now, what was that affair about a certain Isabella Vincent, who was carried off from a farm-house somewhere in Kent, down to Ramsgate?"

"Heavens! what, is this known too?" cried the Frenchwoman. "Well, it was certainly done by agents of mine——"

"Well, then, you see that it is known," proceeded Shadbolt. "And then there's something else too. Ah! and now I know why you talk of a lady at Bayswater! Did you not have some young person—a Miss Ashton, I think—carried off from a villa down in that neighbourhood?—she was rescued by a young nobleman——"

"All this is true!" exclaimed Madame Angelique: and then in a musing manner she added, "But if the Lady Indora gave the information about Christina Ashton, how could she possibly know all the other circumstances?"

"You may be quite satisfied," answered Shadbolt, "that this Indian lady of whom you are talking has nothing to do with the business: so it is no use running your head any longer against that post. I tell you that it all comes from Coleman the lawyer, who is acting for a rich client behind the scenes. Well, you see, ma'am, these circumstances I have been mentioning—and others that are known to the Commissioners—have made the matter serious enough. Your enemies are too powerful—and they will break up your establishment for you, if you don't break it up for yourself. You say you are pretty warm: why not retire at once? Go to France."

Madame Angelique looked bewildered; and in the confusion of her thoughts she was led to confess that on account of certain incidents with regard to the decoying of young women from France, Belgium, and some of the German States, it would be very inconvenient,

or even perilous, for her to set foot on the Continent at all.

"Well then, remain in England," ejaculated Mr. Shadbolt. "Now I will show you how the matter stands. There is to be a prosecution, if my report shows that there is evidence to support it. Of course the Commissioners think that I come here only as a spy, and not to give you any private advice. They imagine that whatever I told them after my first visit here, was only gleaned in the course of conversation—and not on account of any private understanding betwixt you and me. They believe they can rely upon me: and so they have sent me here again on this present occasion. Now, I need not make my report for a day or two—I can pretend that I had other business—or that I could not obtain admission. To-morrow therefore you can dismiss the girls——"

"And give up the establishment!" added Madame Angelique, in a decided tone: for her mind was now relieved in more ways than one, and she was enabled to breathe more freely than she had done for some time past.

"Why break up the millinery part of the establishment?" inquired Shadbolt. "I did not mean that."

"The millinery branch," responded the Frenchwoman, "is nothing in comparison with the other. Though I have plenty of custom, yet what with long credit, and some of the highest families never thinking of paying at all—what with the expenses too—— Besides, Mr. Shadbolt," added the milliner, in a tone of confidence, "half my lady-customers would leave me the moment this house ceased to be one of accommodation. So it is decided!—I give up everything, and I retire on my means. As for the girls, I know where to place them at once——And," added the Frenchwoman to herself, "I can turn a last penny by each of them."

"Well, then, retire!" exclaimed Mr. Shadbolt; "and when you are out of business, I will show you how to make more money than ever you have done while in it."

"You?" ejaculated Madame Angelique.

"Yes, I—even I, honest Ike Shadbolt! But no matter now; you shall know all when the time comes. Go and settle down in some comfortable place—some pretty little villa on the outskirts—and

make yourself as happy as the day is long. I shall come back here in the course of the week, and shall then report to the Commissioners that the establishment is broken up—that the girls are all gone—and that the tailor next door has bricked up the means of communication between the two houses. So there will be an end of prosecutions and all other unpleasantness. And now, my dear madam, if you think all this advice of mine, and all the good I am going to do you is worth anything—

“Oh, to be sure,” ejaculated Madame Angelique, who, though she comprehended all the selfishness of Shadbolt's disposition, was nevertheless but too glad to secure his good offices.

A liberal gratuity was therefore placed in his hand; and he took his departure,—the Frenchwoman not thinking it necessary to allow him to retrace his way through the saloon, but ringing the bell for the liveried footman to show him out by the front door of her own house.

About ten minutes afterwards the Duke of Marchmont was announced.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE MILLINER AND THE DUKE.

The Duke, whose countenance was pale and careworn, and who by his looks had evidently suffered much of late, endeavoured to put on the smile of gracious affability as he entered the luxurious apartment where Madame Angelique was seated. It occurred to him that she bowed somewhat more distantly than was her wont—or at least with an air of greater independence, if not actually commingled with coldness. He threw himself upon a seat—glanced at her for a moment, as if to assure himself whether there were really any studied change in her manner—and then he said, “Well, my able friend, assistant, and accomplice, have you thought of any fresh project—”

“I have just decided, my lord,” responded Madame Angelique, “upon a most serious and important one.”

“Indeed!” ejaculated the Duke eagerly. “And it is this that gives you such an air of mingled gravity and confidence? It is one, therefore, that

will rid you—or perhaps I may say *us*—for ever from all fear of vindictive persecution at the hands of Indora?”

“I no longer fear her persecutions, my lord,” rejoined the Frenchwoman: and her tone was now unmistakably cold, while her manner was stiff.

“I do not understand you!” exclaimed the Duke, not knowing what to think. “Has anything happened to Indora? Has anything been done? Have you in your astuteness devised something better than the aid of Sagoona's dagger or a reptile from the Zoological Gardens?”

“Heaven be thanked,” cried the Frenchwoman, “that neither the steel blade nor the serpent did the work of death! My conscience is at least not burthened with that crime.”

“Then what do you mean?” asked the nobleman, now completely bewildered, and alarmed likewise by whatsoever appeared strangely sinister in the otherwise incomprehensible look, tone, and manner of Madame Angelique. “What is this project on which you have decided?”

“To break up my establishment altogether—retire into a pleasant little villa—and live in comfort for the rest of my days, apart from all intrigues and the perils thereof.”

The Duke of Marchmont was astounded. As the reader is aware, he was in mortal dread of the Princess Indora: he had the most cogent reasons for destroying her life, so that he might silence her for ever; and here was the hitherto useful and willing agent of whom he had made a tool for the purpose of carrying out his fell design,—here she was, we say, suddenly slipping out of his hands!

“You surely cannot be serious?” he at length faltered out: “you would not abandon a business—pardon me, an avocation—which is so lucrative?”

“And which makes me the dupe of others!” rejoined Madame Angelique, with emphatic tone and significant look.

“What mean you?” inquired Marchmont. “Your words seem pointed—and yet to one who has always been your friend—”

“You have paid me, my lord, for the services which I have rendered,” answered Madame Angelique; “and on that score we are quits. But you have endeavoured to render me your instrument in the accomplishment of a deed

from which I now recoil with horror,—yes, and even with wonder that I could have ever contemplated it! With all the arts of sophistry you led me to believe that I incurred the most terrific dangers at Indora's hands——”

“And had you not the proof?” inquired the Duke, vainly endeavouring to conceal the bitter vexation and even the terror which he experienced. “Did not an agent of the police——”

“Yes—he came, certainly; but I was altogether mistaken as to the origin of his visit. In one word, my Lord Duke, the Lady Indora has nothing to do with this proceeding on the part of the Commissioners of Police: it all emanates from some wealthy person in the background, who acts through the medium of his attorney, Mr. Coleman.”

“Coleman—Coleman?” said the Duke, thus repeating the name in a musing tone. “Surely I have heard it before—and somewhat recently too. Coleman? Ah! I recollect!—it is that lawyer who has been advancing Armytage such considerable sums of money!”

“Do you then know anything of this Mr. Coleman, my lord?” inquired the Frenchwoman. “But it matters not—My mind is made up how to act. I am this evening more at ease than for a long time past I have been; and never—never will I again suffer myself to be beguiled by the representations of one who was all the time endeavouring to serve his own purposes.”

“You allude to me,” ejaculated the Duke, assuming an air of indignation; “and you wrong me! I thought you in danger from that quarter——”

“Well, well, my lord, we will not dispute the point,” interrupted Madame Angelique: and then she ironically added, “I have no doubt your Grace will now congratulate me on having acquired the certainty that I am no longer in any peril from that quarter?”

“Oh, of course!” exclaimed Marchmont; “if it really is so. But beware, my good friend, how you suffer yourself to be lulled into a false security. It is at such times that the blow falls heaviest——”

“Thank you, my lord,” interrupted the milliner, “I am fully prepared to meet all contingencies of that sort. To-morrow I dismiss the girls—or rather I find them protectors, as their kind and excellent friend who stands

in the light of their mother ought to do.”

Madame Angelique chuckled at her own disgusting levity—and the Duke for an instant bit his lip with vexation. He saw that the milliner was resolved in the plan she had proclaimed: he saw too how hopeless it was to attempt to enlist her services any farther in the prosecution of his designs; and he likewise felt how necessary it was to keep on friendly terms with her. A seal must be placed upon her lips in respect to what had recently occurred: and though for her own sake she would keep silent on those points, yet it by no means suited the Duke's interests that she should speak disparagingly of him in any other sense.

“Well, my dear madam” he accordingly said assuming his blandest tone and his most affable look, “I do indeed congratulate you on this change in your position—I am glad you have reason to feel so confident in respect to the Lady Indora. And now, as you are about to retire into private life, if there be anything I can do——”

“Yes—there is something,” responded Madame Angelique. “The four girls must be comfortably provided for: I mean to leave off business with a good character—and those charmers of mine must not go forth into the world to proclaim what I have been. So little has actually transpired in respect to the true character of this house, that the public in general will give me credit for being a respectable milliner who is retiring on a fortune legitimately obtained.”

“To be sure, my dear madam!” ejaculated Marchmont: “you will keep your own counsel with respect to the past—you will provide for the girls, as to seal their lips; and those friends who have so long patronized your establishment—myself amongst the number—will of course do the best to sustain your respectability by their good report.”

“I expect nothing less at their hands,” answered Madame Angelique “and I purpose to test the sincerity of the friendship of four of my principal patrons. To begin therefore with you Grace, I give you your choice of the four young ladies in the saloon.”

“Commend me to Eglantine!” exclaimed Marchmont, who at once saw the necessity of yielding to that which

was in reality a command on the part of the Frenchwoman. "To-morrow I will take handsome apartments somewhere for Eglantine—I will let you know the address in the course of the day—and she can then remove hither."

"Eglantine must prove an exception from the choice," answered Madame Angelique. "I had forgotten at the moment that I have a particular way of disposing of her. Either of the other three—"

"It is impossible, my dear madam," interrupted the Duke, "that I can take either Armantine or Linda, who have been so long beneath your roof, and who are so well known amongst all your patrons! I should be laughed at—ridiculed—"

"Then why not Marion?" demanded the Frenchwoman. "And now I bethink me I can place Armantine and Linda equally as well as I can Eglantine. Therefore, my lord, it must be Marion."

"But, my dear Madame Angelique!" said the Duke: "in the first place I believe that Marion dislikes me—you remember I have complained to you of her refusal—"

"Mere coyness on her part—or else artifice and stratagem to render herself all the more acceptable when she might choose to surrender."

"But there is another reason?" exclaimed the Duke.

"Is this your friendship?" cried Madame Angelique, with a great show of indignation, and half starting from her seat.

"Do not be angry!—we were but discussing the point—"

"And it is no longer open for discussion. Take Marion or not, as you think fit," continued the Frenchwoman: "but if you refuse, I shall know what value to set upon the friendship of your Grace."

Marchmont bit his lip almost till the blood came: Madame Angelique's look was resolutely decisive; and not daring to quarrel with her, he affected to laugh, saying, "Well, well, I suppose like all ladies, you must have your own way! So let it be the particular beauty whom you have thus allotted to me."

"Be it so: it is settled, my lord," replied Madame Angelique. "I have not the slightest doubt that Marion, who has been under the protection of

an Earl, will feel proud in the long run to own the tender friendship of a Duke.

There was a slight accent of sarcasm in the milliner's tone: for she was avenging herself, as far as she thought fit, for the conduct of Marchmont in having duped her into becoming the instrument of his own designs, incomprehensible to the Frenchwoman though they were, in respect to Indora. The Duke, comprehending Madame Angelique's meaning, again bit his lip with vexation: but bowing to conceal it, he issued from the room.

On leaving the milliner's house, the Duke of Marchmont walked slowly along the street, plunged in a deep and painful reverie. He had numerous sources of bitter vexation as well as of alarm; and amongst the former the arrangement just made—or rather just enforced, in respect to Marion, was not the least. He knew that she had been the mistress of the Earl of Baltinge; and he by no means relished the idea of taking up with that nobleman's discarded paramour. The expense of keeping Marion entered not for a moment into his consideration: for he was wealthy enough to gratify any such fantasy if he had the inclination. But even in the sphere of vice and immorality, the haughty tone of aristocratic feeling prevails; and Marchmont winced at the idea that he, a Duke, should be compelled to take under his protection the cast-off mistress of an Earl. Were she the discarded paramour of a King, a Prince, or even a Royal Duke, it would have been different. Such was the sensitiveness of a man who hesitated not to make a familiar companion of a woman like Madame Angelique, the keeper of a fashionable house of infamy,—a man too who would have plunged himself into crime to rid his path of an enemy, like Indora, who, as he had reason to believe, was by some means or another threatening his security.

As the Duke of Marchmont was continuing his way slowly, and in deep brooding thoughtfulness, along the street, he encountered some one who suddenly addressed him by name;—and looking up, he beheld the Hon. Wilson Stanhope.

"My lord, I greet you," said that unprincipled individual, in a tone of familiarity.

"Ah! so you have returned from Paris?" observed the Duke, somewhat coldly.

"Yes—where I am sorry to say," responded Stanhope, "I fell in with persons who were cleverer than myself and the consequence is I am as completely cleared out as ever an unfortunate devil was. I was just thinking to whom I could apply for a little friendly succour, when behold! fortune throws me in the ways of your Grace."

"Then your pocket, I presume, is empty?" said the Duke, speaking slowly and in a musing manner: for he was revolving in his mind something that had just occurred to him.

"So empty," rejoined Stanhope, "that the introduction of such a thing as fifty guineas into that pocket of mine would be a veritable god-send. May I anticipate that for old acquaintance sake—and you must remember my lord, that if that affair with her Grace down at Oaklands ended in failure—"

"It was not your fault, I admit," returned the Duke: "but you must also recollect that I gave you a liberal reward. Enough, however, on that point! I think I can do something for you now. What would you say if I were to introduce you to-morrow to a handsome suite of apartments—a beautiful girl already installed there as the genius of the scene—and with an account opened at a banker's in your name to the extent of five hundred pounds?"

"I should say, my lord," replied Stanhope, "that it was a truly ducal manner in getting rid of a mistress of whom your Grace is tired—and that I am so overwhelmed by the favour I at once accept it."

"Then it is a bargain," said Marchmont; "and here is an earnest thereof," he added, slipping his purse into Stanhope's hand. "Come to me to-morrow evening—But no! do not make your appearance in Belgrave Square—Dine with me at the Clarendon Hotel at seven o'clock—and after our wine I will conduct you to the little paradise where a houri's arms will be open to receive you."

"I shall be punctual, my lord," answered Wilson Stanhope. "But one word! Is not this great favour which you are showing me, the prelude to something else?"

"What mean you?" inquired Marchmont: but the tone in which the question was put, convinced Stanhope that his surmise was correct.

"Let me speak frankly, my lord," he said. "I asked for fifty pounds and you proffer me five hundred. This really nothing more than a compensation for taking your cast-mistress—"

"On my soul, she is no mistress mine!" interrupted the Duke. "I have seen her—I have joked with her—never beyond such companionship as any familiarity been permitted by me. I have endeavoured—But enough. Suffice it for you to know that she has been the mistress of Belgrave—that she is now at Madame Angelique's—at that to-morrow she will be in handsome apartments, ready to receive you."

"Good, my lord!" ejaculated Stanhope. "But still I think there is something that lies beyond all this. You require my services in another way—and you are giving me the retainer fee?"

"And if it be so?" said the Duke pointedly.

"You will find me ready and willing as before. Only let me know at once that I may shape my arrangement accordingly."

"Then shape them," answered the Duke, "according to the impression you have received—and perhaps I may be more explicit to-morrow evening."

With these words Marchmont hastened away: but scarcely had he entered the next street, when he beheld Mr. Armytage proceeding slowly a little way in front of him. The Duke immediately overtook him: but ere he spoke a word, he caught a sufficient glimpse of his countenance to indicate that the speculator was occupied in no very agreeable reflections.

"I am afraid the world goes not well with you, Travers?" began the Duke.

"Travers!" echoed Armytage staring: "how imprudent you are, my lord."

"I forgot," said the Duke: "it was indeed imprudent. But is my surmise correct? does the world still go differently with you? I need however scarcely ask," added his Grace with slight accent of vexation, "for you do not keep faith with me, Armytage—though I plainly told you that it would."

inconvenience me seriously if you were to fail."

"And perhaps I have been inconvenienced still more" said Armytage gruffly.

"It was not altogether well of you," resumed the Duke. "Upwards of five weeks have elapsed since you borrowed that last sum of twenty-five thousand pounds, with the assurance that in a few days you would be enabled to return it, as by taking up certain bills your credit would be good for fifty thousand. Was not that the way in which you put the matter to me?"

"I daresay it was, my lord," replied Armytage in a manner much less respectful than he was wont to observe towards his patrician patron.

"I suppose that Mr. Coleman—the gentleman whom you mentioned—disappointed you?" proceeded the Duke, adopting a more conciliatory tone than at first. "If it were so, there is certainly some excuse."

Armytage continued silent as he walked in seeming moodiness by the Duke of Marchmont's side along the street.

"Yes—there would be an excuse," continued his Grace: "and therefore I could make allowances for you. But who is this Mr. Coleman?"

"A solicitor. Your lordship knows it already," rejoined Armytage: "I have told you so."

"And did he fly from his word?" inquired the Duke.

Again Armytage was silent—but only for a few instants; and then he said, "To tell your Grace the truth, Mr. Coleman did *not* fly from his word: he advanced me the money—yes, every farthing of it!" added Zoe's father, as if with the bitterness of desperation.

"And you do not mean me to understand that you have lost it all?" exclaimed Marchmont in dismay. "Why, money appears to melt out of your pocket as quickly as in former times it was wont to pour into it!"—then, as the thought struck his Grace, he said, "By heaven, Armytage, I am afraid that you gamble?"

"Yes—gamble as some of the highest and wealthiest in the City of London gamble!" replied the speculator.—"not as you noblemen and gentlemen gamble at the West End in such places as these:"—and he glanced towards a flood of light

streaming forth from the portals of a splendid club-house they were passing.

"You mean on the Stock Exchange?" said the Duke inquiringly.

"I mean on the Stock Exchange," replied Armytage curtly.

They continued walking on together in silence for a few minutes.—Armytage with his looks bent downward in moody reverie—the Duke of Marchmont in anxious thought; for he was now sorry that he had addressed the speculator at all, inasmuch as he feared lest the interview should end by the demand for another loan.

"And is that enormous sum of fifty thousand pounds," he at length asked,—"which you obtained from Mr. Coleman—is it all gone?"

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Armytage, clutching the Duke's arms quickly and violently, and looking up into his face with a countenance which, as the nearest gas-lamp streamed upon it, appeared absolutely ghastly. "Surely that question of yours was not prophetic of evil? No, no—I should be utterly, hopelessly ruined!"

"Then what, in the name of heaven, have you done?" inquired the Duke; "and why are you in this dreadfully perturbed state of mind?"

"Because I have ventured the whole of that sum upon a speculation which will either in one day—in one hour—I might almost say in one moment—give me a fortune—or on the other hand,"—he gulped for a moment, and then added gaspingly—"or beggar me!"

"How mad! how foolish!" exclaimed Marchmont.

"Yes—mad and foolish," responded Armytage with almost the petulance of retort, "if it had been my own money with which I was speculating, but it was *not*! And therefore what had I to do but to make the best of it? It was neck-or-nothing—riches once more or utter ruin!"

"And when will the result be known?" inquired the Duke.

"Exactly one month hence," replied Armytage.

"One month? And wherefore are you so desponding and mistrustful now?"

"Because—because," answered the speculator, "I have just been reading the evening paper—and the intelligence is unfavourable for the particular way in which my money is laid out. Nevertheless, things may take a turn!—

to-morrow their aspect may be as favourable as to-day it is gloomy. But, Oh! what a life to lead, my lord!—at one time exultant with hope—at another cast down into the vortex of despair—yesterday dreaming of countless riches, to-day recoiling in horror from the presence of the grovelling mendicant who crawls past, with the hideous presentiment that his condition is a type of what mine may shortly be!”

There was another pause for some minutes, during which the Duke and the speculator continued walking on together; and the silence was suddenly broken by the latter—who said in a milder and more respectful tone than he had hitherto adopted, “I am afraid your Grace must think I spoke rudely, and even brutally just now: but such was the state of my mind——”

“Say no more upon the subject,” interrupted Marchmont, who perhaps had his own reasons for not dealing harshly with the speculator. “I can make allowances for you. Your daughter—have you heard from her lately?”

“Ah, my daughter! and young Meredith!” ejaculated Armytage, with a renewal of the petulant bitterness of his tone; “it is this that drives me mad! I care not so much for myself although it would be shocking enough for a man who has seen such wealth and raised himself to such a position, to sink down into poverty! Ah! you know not all

“Tell me everything, Armytage,” said the Duke: not that he experienced any veritable friendly interest in the man’s affairs, but he wished to ascertain the precise position wherein he stood, so that he might thereby measure the amount of chance there was of any fresh appeals being made to his own purse.

“Your Grace is probably aware,” replied Armytage, “that when Lord Octavian Meredith married my daughter, I settled upon her the sum of sixty thousand pounds; and I further agreed to allow Meredith a thousand a-year for his own pocket-money. Well, my lord, before Zoe went abroad, she executed a power of attorney, enabling me to manage her finances for her—so that Lord Octavian should be supplied with a sufficiency to maintain the establishment in the Regent’s

Park, and I was to remit such sums as Zoe might require for her own expenses.”

“And you do not mean me to understand,” said the Duke in a deep tone of anxiety, “that you have made away with your daughter’s money?”

A mean from the lips of the wretched Armytage conveyed the response, Marchmont was indeed profoundly shocked: for he was at once smitten with the dread that exactions far greater than those previously made—great though these already were—would be sooner or later attempted in respect to his own purse.

“Yes—it is but too true!” continued Armytage, in a scarcely audible voice. “The rascality of that man Preston was an ominous date for me! Down to that period everything had gone well whatsoever I touched seemed to turn into gold: but since then everything has gone wrong—the money, as you just now expressed it has melted away ten thousand times faster than ever it was previously made or got. Or perhaps I myself have speculated more recklessly—more desperately! And yet how could it be otherwise? I sought to repair the terrible losses I sustained——”

“And your daughter’s money is all gone—absolutely gone?” inquired Marchmont, still incredulous in respect to so colossal an evil.

“Yes—gone, gone!” responded Armytage: and again he groined in bitterness. “Now your Grace can understand why I am so desponding at times, and wherefore I am haunted with such fearful apprehensions. If ruin overtakes me, it will not be ruin for myself alone—but ruin for Zoe—ruin for her husband—ruin therefore for all three!”

“And do you really anticipate that this last speculation of yours may turn out wrong?”

“Again I say, heaven forbid! But your Grace knows the terrible uncertainties of such ventures. Look you, my lord!” exclaimed Armytage, with a sudden access of fervid, almost wild joy. “If I succeed, this day month will behold me in possession of two hundred and fifty thousand pounds! With that sum I restore Zoe’s fortune—I pay Coleman—I return your Grace the loan you so kindly advanced—Oh, yes!

fortune *must* favour me—it is impossible it can be otherwise!”

“And if it should happen to turn out contrary to your expectations,” said the Duke,—“have you a very hard man to deal with in this Mr. Coleman?”

“To tell your Grace the truth, I can scarcely understand him,” replied Armytage. “It was not I who originally sought him out: he came to seek me. It was very shortly after that first little embarrassment of mine, which arose from Preston’s failure, you know—and when your Grace so generously advanced me fifty thousand pounds in January last—Mr. Coleman one day called upon me. Apologizing for having introduced himself, he said that he had a wealthy client who wished to lay out his money at good interest; and as he knew that I had excellent opportunities of accommodating the members of the aristocracy and fashionable gentlemen with loans, he had taken the liberty of waiting upon me for the purpose of ascertaining if I would thus use any money he might place in my hands. It was thus our connection commenced.”

“And who is this wealthy client of Mr. Coleman’s?” asked the Duke, thinking it probable that he might be the same who was secretly urging the lawyer on to the prosecution of Madame Angelique.

“I do not know,” replied Armytage: “I never saw him—never even heard his name mentioned. In fact, my lord, I do not believe that there is any such client in the back-ground at all. There are several of these lawyers who lay out their own money at interest, pretending it is that of their clients. They do it to save their respectability and avoid the reputation of usurers. But as I was just now observing to your Grace, I cannot exactly make out this Mr. Coleman. He seemed to force his money upon me as it were in the first instance; and afterwards, when he found me punctual in my engagements with him, he suddenly appeared to place such unlimited confidence in me—and though I do verily believe he must have had a suspicion, from one or two little circumstances, that I was no so rich as I appeared to be, yet he unhesitatingly kept his word, and let me have that last sum of fifty thousand—”

“Rest assured, Armytage,” interrupted the Duke of Marchmont, “he suspected nothing of what you fancy—

or he would not have been quite so willing to give you his money. By the bye, did you ever hear him speak of being engaged in a prosecution against a certain house of fashionable resort—you understand what I mean—a house of a certain description—”

“No, never,” responded Armytage. “When I have been at his office, we have conversed on nothing except the business which took me thither. And now, my lord, as I have reached the house where I have a call to make to-night—”

“Is it not rather late for a call, Armytage?” inquired the Duke with a smile.

“It is young gentleman; named Softly, belonging to the Guards, and who will be of age in eight or ten months,” replied the financier. “He wants to raise some money—he has sent for me—and I must therefore keep the time which best pleases himself. And now I bid your Grace Goodnight.”

They separated accordingly; and as the Duke of Marchmont slowly took his way homeward, he resolved in his mind a certain plan which he had formed, and in furtherance of which he intended to enlist the aid of the Hon. Wilson Stanhope.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII

MADAME ANGELIQUE’S THREE

BILLETS.

IMMEDIATELY after breakfast on the following morning, Madame Angelique sat down at her writing-desk, and penned three notes, which she despatched to as many different addresses.

At about one in the afternoon an old nobleman, having passed through M. Bertin’s house and entered that of the milliner by the mirror-contrived door, found his way to the elegantly appointed boudoir where Madame Angelique was waiting to receive him. He was verging towards his eightieth year: his form was completely bowed: the few straggling hairs of his head were of snowy whiteness—his eyes were bleared—his face was one mass of puckerings and wrinkles—he had lost all his teeth—and the outline of his profile consisted of a number of sharp angles. He was so infirm that he

walked with considerable difficulty: he had a continuous hacking cough; and he mumbled and stammered to a degree that rendered him scarcely intelligible. With the whole of one foot and half the other in the grave—deaf, and in its dotage—this nobleman had nevertheless only just returned from an embassy at one of the principal Continental courts after an absence from England of some five or six years.

Lord Wenham—for such was his denomination—had been an old patron of Madame Angelique previous to his appointment to the embassy above alluded to: he was well therefore initiated in the mysteries of her household—but the four young ladies whom the private part of her establishment now contained, were complete strangers to him. She had heard of his recent return to the British metropolis; and being resolved to make a last penny out of him before she gave up business altogether, she had written him the note which now brought him into her presence.

"Why, my dear Madame Angelique," mumbled the old lord, as he deposited himself in an easy chair—an effort which raised so violent a fit of coughing that for upwards of a minute it seemed as if his enervated frame must be shattered to pieces,—“I vow and protest that you look—ugh! ugh!—this cough of mine!—younger than when I last saw you.”

"And yet, my lord," responded the milliner, "the lapse of five years can scarcely make one look younger——"

"Ah, very good! very good!" said Lord Wenham, laughing with a chuckle that was hideous as a death-rattle. "Yes, yes—in spite of five years you find me looking—ugh! ugh!—younger also?"—for he observed that on account of his deafness he had not caught the precise terms of the milliner's speech.

"You look so young, my lord," exclaimed Madame Angelique, taking advantage of the little error into which he had fallen, and now speaking loud enough to make herself heard, "that I am convinced you are as terrible amongst the fair sex as ever!"

"Ah, ah! I understand," said Lord Wenham: "you have got—ugh! ugh!—some sweet creature that you mean to tempt me with—eh? eh?—ugh! ugh!"

"Fully esteeming your lordship's kind patronage," rejoined Madame Angelique, "before you went as Ambassador Plenipotentiary to the Court of——, I was resolved to give you the preference for the most beautiful girl that ever confidently placed herself in my hands. I can assure you, my lord," added the wily woman, with a significant look, "that she is as pure and virtuous as the day she was born—an immaculate virgin!"

The old nobleman leered and licked his lips salaciously.

"It is a positive fact, my lord," continued Madame Angelique. "The truth is, she has recently been left an orphan: and to be candid, she is a niece of mine. What can I do with her, poor thing! except provide for her in a way of which her beauty renders her so deserving?"

"To be sure! to be sure!" said the old nobleman, who in order that he might not lose a single syllable that fell from Madame Angelique's lips, drew forth an ear-trumpet, and listened therewith. "Go on—ugh! ugh!"

"It is all precisely as I have the honour to inform your lordship," continued the woman: "and therefore——But what do you think?" she suddenly ejaculated. "Somehow or another the Duke of Marchmont heard of this lovely creature being under my care; and he came last night and offered me five hundred guineas to take her off my hands. But I said, 'No, no, my Lord Duke! I have the honour of a nobleman's acquaintance who I know will cheerfully write me a cheque for a thousand, and bear off Miss Eglantine in triumph!'—That's what I said, my lord."

"And you meant me?" said Lord Wenham, full of nervous anxiety to obtain possession of the much-vaunted prize: "you meant me, my dear creature—ugh! ugh! this cough of mine!—But you meant me?"

"Certainly I did, my lord! And was I not right?"

"To be sure! to be sure!" responded his lordship. "But can you really guarantee—eh!—you know what I mean—ugh! ugh!"

"That she is innocence itself!" exclaimed Madame Angelique, "In short, she is almost too prudish: but I have no doubt that with your lordship powers of cajolery—those powers which, as the

newspapers say, you used to such effect when you put the Foreign Minister at the Court of—in such a dilemma—”

“Ah you have heard of that?” said the ancient diplomatist, chuckling. “Egad! I talked his Excellency off to sleep; and when he woke up, he signed the treaty in the twinkling of an eye. But about this Miss Eglantine—what a sweet name! dear me, what a sweet name!—ugh! ugh! ugh!”

“She is your’s therefore, my lord!” answered Madame Angelique; “and the bargain is concluded.”

“Eh?—stop!” cried his lordship. “I should just like, you know, to see her first of all—merely, you know—ugh! ugh!—this cough of mine—ugh!”

“To be sure! I will go and fetch her at once. There are writing-materials: your lordship can pen the cheque—for if you are not satisfied with the first view of her your lordship can but cancel the draught.”

Having thus spoken, Madame Angelique issued from the boudoir; and leaving his lordship in the midst of an ecstatic fit to coughing, she ascended to the private chamber of Miss Eglantine, who had only just completed her toilet. For this paragon of virtue and innocence, who was also tinged with prudery, had been passing the night, and several hours of the forenoon also, in the arms of one of the frequenters of Madame Angelique’s establishment.

“Now, my dear girl,” said the crafty woman, “I am come to announce to you that your fortune is made. I purpose to give up my business as soon as possible: but in all motherly kindness I mean to provide for the dear girls—yourself included—whom I look upon as my daughters. Here is a nobleman immensely rich, who will take you into his keeping: he will allow you at least eighty pounds a week; and if you play your cards well, you can marry him. To be sure, he is not quite so young as he might be—perhaps sixty or so, though he may look a trifle older: but then there is *this* to be considered—that you manage him all the more easily: for he is somewhat in his dotage. Come along with me at once. You must look as modest as possible; and when, in his lordship’s presence, I hint at the connexion you are about to form with

him, you had better shriek out—not too loud, you know, for fear of being overheard—and then you can cling to me; and if you choose to go off in a fit, why, it may perhaps be as well. However, in the long run you will yield your consent; and his lordship will provide for you this very day. Of course you understand, my dear, that I am perfectly disinterested in what I am doing for you: my only object is to give you a comfortable position—and I do not get one farthing by it—no, not a fraction!”

Eglantine was perfectly willing to fall into the infamous woman’s views; and she at once followed Madame Angelique to the boudoir. A glance at the writing-desk showed the milliner that the cheque lay there, ready drawn out: and the instant she had introduced Eglantine to the ex-ambassador, she seized the opportunity while his lordship’s eyes were riveted gloatingly upon the supposed victim of an aunt’s treacherous cupidity, to catch up the draft and thrust it amidst the folds of her dress. The entire scene, as previously arranged, was then gone through: the half-suppressed shriek was uttered—the prudery was affected—the appeal to the wicked aunt was made by the innocent and virtuous niece—and then the latter sank gracefully down in a fit, just as an actress swoons or dies upon the stage—though with perhaps a trifle more of voluptuous abandonment of the form. Water was sprinkled upon Eglantine’s countenance: she suffered herself to be slowly recovered—she then listened with admirable patience and meekness to Madame Angelique’s reasoning—and with an equal degree of exemplary resignation she yielded herself to her destiny.

In the afternoon Lord Wenham came in his carriage to fetch away his paragon of virtue; and he placed her in a sumptuously furnished house which he hired for her accommodation with an allowance of eighty pounds per week. We may add that in the evening of the very same day on which his lordship paid Madame Angelique a thousand guineas for the beautiful Eglantine and gave the young lady the first instalment of her magnificent income, he most generously and nobly forwarded a cheque for two guineas to the Secretary of the Society for the Distribution of Bread amongst the Famishing Poor and

a cheque for twenty guineas to the Association for the Protection of Young Females.

To return however to Madame Angelique. Scarcely had she effected her most disinterested arrangement with Lord Wenham, and had dismissed the paralyzed doting old nobleman, —when the second of the three billets which she had despatched in the morning, was personally answered by the appearance of a gentleman rejoicing in the name of Mr. White Choker. He was dressed in complete black, and wore a low cravat of snowy fairness. He showed no shirt-collar, and had altogether a very clerical look. His hair was cropped all round like a Puritan's and was combed sleek and straight down over his forehead. He had a long pale countenance, the expression of which was so habitually that of sanctimonious self-martyrization and lugubrious demureness, that even when he tried to smile on entering the milliner's boudoir, he looked like an undertaker or a funeral-mute making a desperate attempt to appear gay. Very keen-sighted persons, on regarding Mr. White Choker more closely, might have fancied that there was something in the expression of his coarse lips and in the gleaming of his dark deep-set small eyes which denoted the strong passions of the man and the difficulty he had in concealing them beneath the gloss of assumed sanctity and hypocritical cant: but on this point we ourselves say nothing—for Mr. White Choker was a saint!

Yes—great indeed was he at Exeter Hall at the period of the May meetings. Who could so well declaim against the ignorance and demoralization of the lower classes? who could whine and moan and weep in such desperate anguish at the benighted condition of the heathen, thousands and thousands of miles off in the islands of the South Pacific? Who could so pathetically enforce the necessity of sending missionaries, and flannel jackets, and hymn-books, and tracts and all kinds of godly publications, to the poor naked cannibals of those islands? Who was more ready in putting down his money for the Foreign Bible Society, or in taking up the starving beggar who implored alms of him in a street of the British metropolis? In a word, Mr. White Choker was a veritable saint; his name was considered synonymous

with piety philanthropy themselves and if it were the fashion in this Protestant country for persons to be canonized—and before they were dead too—Mr. White Choker was the very man whom all the Exeter Hallites would have selected for the honour, and whom the whole Bench of Bishops would have pronounced worthy thereof.

Of course the reader is fully prepared to hear that so good a man could only have come to Madame Angelique's establishment with one object: namely to read its proprietress a very long and serious lecture on the wickedness of the life she was leading. And yet somehow or another this was *not* the worthy gentleman's aim for, as we have seen, it was in answer to one the milliner's billets that he now showed himself in her presence.

"My dear Mr. Choker," she began, with one of her most amiable smiles, "I am sure you will be delighted to learn that I have resolved upon retiring from business and living henceforth respectably upon my means."

"Come now, mother," said the white-cravatted gentleman, with a more successful attempt at a laugh than he had previously made, "this is not Exeter Hall—neither is it a committee of the Foreign Cannibal-Reclaiming, Negro-Christianising and Naked-Savage-Clothing Society. Everything is good in its place and way——"

"And you have come," my dear Mr. Choker," interrupted Madame Angelique, blandly, "for whatsoever I may have good in *my* place and in *my* way to put at your disposal?"

"That is speaking like a true Christian—I mean like a woman of the world," said Mr. Choker, thus very properly correcting himself.

"It is a long, long time, my dear sir," continued the milliner, "since the light of your countenance shone within my humble habitation; and therefore I thought that I might take the liberty under peculiar circumstances, of inviting you here on the present occasion."

"The truth is," answered Mr. White Choker, "that hypocritical scoundrel Obadiah Snufflenose, the Vice-President of our Society, frequents your house; and as he and I are at daggers drawn——"

"And yet," exclaimed Madame Angelique, with some degree of astonishment, "I saw the other day a published

letter of your's to the gentleman you name, and commencing, "Dearest and best beloved brother in the good work, Obadiah Snufflenose——"

"I tell you once more," said Mr. White Choker, with considerable asperity, "that we are not sitting in committee upon the distribution of that last new tract addressed to all savoury vessels. But d—n the vessels! My dear madam, let's get to business. Why did you send for me?"

"If you were to hear, Mr. White Choker," continued Madame Angelique, "that I have the loveliest German girl beneath this roof, who has only gone astray once—once upon my honour, and no more——"

"Ah, if I thought I could rely upon you," said Mr. Choker whose curiosity, as well as a stronger passion, was considerably piqued. "But it was not altogether on account of Snufflenose that I have staid away from your establishment for the last three or four years: it was because that young creature—you remember her well—that you furnished me, with the solemn assurance she was chastity herself, presented me with—a—a—thumping boy four or five months afterwards, and threatened to expose me if I did not provide for the brat. Ah, madam, that was a sad, sad affair——"

"But, my dear friend Mr. Choker," interrupted Madame Angelique, "we are all liable to error——"

"But such an error as that, my dear madam! Only conceive a thumping boy!"—and the white-cravatted gentleman's countenance became so elongated at the bare thought, that at the moment it could have vied with the length of her bright poker itself.

"Well, my dear sir, I admit the thumping boy was a great nuisance—a very great nuisance. But in this case, with my beautiful charming Linda, who has only fallen once, there cannot possibly be any such apprehension. If you were just to see her——But do you think?" ejaculated the milliner, thus suddenly interrupting herself. "Old Lord Wenham was here just now, and he actually and positively drew me out a cheque for four hundred guineas for this sweet German. And what did I say? No, no, my lord; I have the the honour of being acquainted with a gentleman who will give five hundred! That's what I said, Mr. Choker!"

"But you mentioned no name?" said the saint, anxiously.

"Not for the world!" responded Madame Angelique. "An—this dear Linda, who is discretion itself,—she will never betray you; but she will go to Exeter Hall when you are to speak—and she will wave the white handkerchief—she will weep too at your most pathetic passages—in fact, she will act an entire bench-full of the audience whimpering and sobbing."

"Oh, bother take Exeter Hall at this present moment!" cried the saint; and his interjection was accompanied by a most unsaint-like oath. "You want five hundred guineas for this Linda? Hand her! But is she so very beautiful? Is she well formed—stout—luxurious——"

"A superb bust, my dear Mr. Choker. But come I here are writing-materials—draw up the cheque—and I will go and fetch the charming Linda, so that you may arrive at a speedy decision."

With these words, Madame Angelique quitted the boudoir; and ascended to the chamber of the German girl,—who having, like Miss Eglantine, recently dismissed an admirer who regularly visited her twice a week, was finishing her toilet by the aid of a female dependant. The maid was dismissed from the room; and Madame Angelique, having intimated her intention retiring into private life, proceeded to address the young lady in the following manner:—

"It is therefore my duty as well as my pleasure, dear Linda, to provide for yourself and companions. You know what I have just done for Eglantine; and now it is your turn. A very pious gentleman will take you into his keeping; he will pension you handsomely; and when your child is born—which I suppose will be in about five months—he *must* provide for it liberally, because you will have him completely in your power. He has got a wife and large family; and if you only threaten to go to his house and create a disturbance, you might bring him to any terms. He is immensely rich, and as thorough-paced a hypocrite as ever the sun shone upon. Of course, my dear girl, you will keep your condition a secret as long as you can; and between you and me, I have assured him that you are but one remove from complete chastity—However, you will

know how to manage your white-cravatted puritan; and now come and be introduced to him. Sop!—you can throw a kerchief over your neck, so as to appear modest; and you can easily suffer it to glide off, as if quite unconsciously, in the bashful confusion of your thoughts.”

Linda was well pleased with the arrangements thus sketched forth; and the kerchief being duly thrown over her neck, she accompanied Madame Angelique to the boudoir, where Mr. White Choker had in the meantime penned the cheque for five hundred guineas. Linda appeared all blushing modesty; and her looks were bent down, as the saint devoured her with his gloating eyes. There was a little conversation, during which the kerchief glided off from the siren's white neck and voluptuous bosom; and her triumph was complete.

In the evening Mr. White Choker came in a street-cab to fetch away his charmer; and though he dared not use his own private carriage for the purpose, he nevertheless promised that on the following day Linda should have the most beautiful turn-out of her own that was to be seen in all London. He installed her in a beautiful little suburban villa, ready furnished, and which he had hired off-hand for her immediate accommodation: then, as an excuse for passing that first night away from home, he assured the wife of his bosom the excellent Mrs. White Choker, that he was going to keep a vigil of blessed prayer by the bedside of a dear brother in the good work, who was lying at that extremity which was but the passport to the realm of eternal bliss.

Scarcely had Madame Angelique completed her transaction with Mr. White Choker, when the Hon. Augustus Softly was announced. This young gentleman had just entered his twenty-first year, and would inherit on attaining his majority a fortune of sixty thousand pounds, if he had not already anticipated it by bills and bonds to the tune of nearly one-half. He had recently obtained a commission in the Guards; and on being emancipated from the apron strings of his fashionable mamma, he had resolved to see a little of “life.” It is however chiefly at night-time that he took his survey of what he termed “life:” for inasmuch as he was never in bed until there or

four o'clock in the morning, he slept till it was time to turn out for parade—after which he drank so copiously of bottled stout and cherry-brandy at lunch, “just to give a tone to his stomach,” that he was usually constrained to go to bed again in order to sleep off the effects of so much liquor and rise refreshed for dinner-time. Then his stomach required a new “tone;” and if a couple of bottles of champagne, with other vinous fluids, were capable of affording such tone, the Hon. Augustus Softly certainly adopted the means for procuring it. Turning out “to see life” at ten o'clock at night, he had the advantage of the gas-lamps to show him how to break policeman's heads; or else he dropped into some fashionable gambling house, where there was light sufficient for the blacklegs and sharpers there to pillage him most unmercifully, though apparently not light enough to show the young gentleman himself that he was thus fleeced.

In personal appearance the Hon. Augustus Softly was short and thin—totally beardless, though he adopted every known method of inducing a moustache to make its appearance against its own inclination; and his air was altogether so boyish that he did not look above seventeen. He had tolerably regular features, of an aristocratic cast; but the expression of his countenance was insipid and vacant, even to stolidity. Frivolous-minded and shallow-pated, with all the follies of a boy, he rather aped than was endowed with the manners of a man. His idea of “life,” seemed to consist in hurrying himself on to rack and ruin as fast as ever he could—raising money at exorbitant interest—plunging into debt—lavishing his gold upon pretended friends, who flattered him to his face and laughed at him behind his back—playing the spend-thrift amongst the dissolute and the depraved—thinking it one of the finest things to drop a few hundreds at the gaming table, and the finest thing of all to let my Lord Swindlehurst palm off on him for five hundred guineas a horse that would be dear at fifty. Such was Lieutenant Softly's idea of “life;” and this was the young gentleman who, having received Madame Angelique's third billet, now came to answer it in person.

We must observe that the Hon. Augustus Softly had only visited the

milliner's establishment on two former occasions; and each of those times Mademoiselle Armantine, the French girl, was absent for some reason or another. This Madame Angelique knew full well: she was consequently aware that the young gentleman had never as yet seen her—and hence the game which she was about to play.

"Well old lady," he said, on entering the boudoir—for he thought it might be fine to adopt a familiar manner with Madame Angelique; and we should incidentally remark that he spoke with the languid dissipated air and with the drawing-room drawl which are best approved amongst silly young men in fashionable life—"well, old lady, what on earth could have made you send to drag me out of my comfortable bed at such an unseemly hour in the morning?"

"Yes, it is unseemly," exclaimed Madame Angelique, "I admit it. Only four in the afternoon—in the morning, I mean! But then you see, you fashionable young gentlemen turn night into day, and day into night—Oh! it is positively shocking, you naughty fellows!"

"Why, there's really nothing going on in the day-time," said Mr. Softly, with an air of satiety and disgust. "I am sick of bowing to the same beauties in the Park—sick of lounging up Regent Street; and as for morning-calls—why, we of the Guards, you know, never pay them!"

"Ah! I repeat, you gentlemen of the Guards are such terrible fellows!" said Madame Angelique, with a deprecating look: "you are enough to turn the heads of all the sweet creatures—ravish their hearts——"

"Well, I flatter myself," drawled out Mr. Softly leaning affectedly back in his chair and caressing his beardless chin with an air of languid listlessness, "we of the Guards are rather overpowering in our way."

"You may well say that, my dear Mr. Softly: for if you only knew why I took the liberty of asking you to favour me with a call this afternoon—morning, I mean——"

"Some precious wickedness, I'll be bound!"—and Mr. Softly condescended to give forth a slight laugh, which corresponded amazingly well with his drawing-room drawl.

"Wickedness indeed, you naughty good-for-nothing fellow?" responded the wily woman shaking her finger at her intended victim. "Here is the sweetest, loveliest, young French girl, who has been in keeping with the Duke of Marchmont for two months, at the rate of a hundred guineas a week—and who has left him—positively and actually left his Grace, all through you!"

"Through me, old lady?" said Augustus, running his fingers through his limp light hair, which hung in what are called rat's tails over his ears. "What the devil do you mean?"

"I mean that she went to see the Guards parade the other day; and she came running off to me—for I am her milliner, you must know—to ask if I could tell her who was that duck of a young officer? And then she described you!"

"How delicious!—positively delicious!" said Mr. Softly, chuckling and rubbing his hands.

"I knew whom she meant in a moment," continued Madame Angelique; "because when she said that she alluded to the handsomest, the genteeldest, and yet the most military-looking of all the young officers, I was perfectly well aware whom she was speaking of: and when I told her that I had the honour of your acquaintance, she nearly fainted with joy—and she vowed that she could be happier with you on fifty guineas a week, than with his Grace of Marchmont on two hundred."

"Why this is as good as a romance!" exclaimed the delighted and credulous Augustus.

"Quite as good," answered Madame Angelique: and she no doubt precisely what she said. On my dear Softly, the honour and the glory of running on with a Duke's mistress: Why, it is better than running off with his wife: because a man of the world is always more sensitive in respect to his mistress than he is to his wife. How you will be spoken about!—what a noise you will make!—what a sensation!—and all the ladies will smilingly call you the naughty man!"

"Pon my soul, it will be quite delicious!" exclaimed Lieutenant Softly. "But is she beautiful?"

"Beautiful, elegant, and accomplished" rejoined Madame Angelique. "She

is the daughter of an old French Marquis; and Marchmont took her, by my aid, from a convent between two and three months ago. She never really liked the Duke: her only object was to escape from a seclusion which she abhorred; and as for her virtue, apart from this one little failing, I am ready to guarantee it in a bond of a hundred thousand pounds, or on an affidavit sworn before the Lord Mayor of London."

Of course such guarantees clinched the argument—at least in the mind of the credulous, conceited, and frivolous Augustus Softly; and already as elate as he could be with his presumed conquest, he gave vent to his delight in the most extravagant expressions—all of which Madame Angelique carefully echoed, while laughing in her sleeve.

"Feeling confident," she resumed "that you would grant the dear girl an interview, I sent to request that she would pay me a visit this afternoon. But would you believe it? she is so frenzied with delight, that she orders her maid to pack up, bag and baggage—and away she comes, leaving the splendid apartments the Duke had provided for—and upon her toilette-table a rose-tinted perfumed billet, with a few laconic lines to the effect that she separates from his Grace for ever! I told her that her conduct was madness, as she could not possibly be sure that you would take her under your own protection—though it is true that old Lord Wenham, who was here just now, and saw her alight at my door, offered me two hundred and fifty guineas if I would use my influence——"

"By Jove, I will just make it double!" ejaculated Softly, "I hope you will not feel offended——"

"I really do not know," said Madame Angelique, with a very serious countenance, "whether I ought to receive anything in a transaction which is really so delicate, and which I merely undertook to manage from motives of pity for the sweet creature and out of regard for you. But if you *must* write a cheque for five hundred guineas, I cannot think of wounding your feelings by refusing to accept it."

"How lucky I got that loan through Armytage this morning!" thought the young lieutenant to himself, as, putting aside all his fashionable languor, he

flew to the desk to pen the cheque: "else I should have cut but a devilish sorry figure with the old lady—an should have lost the French beauty."

"Dear me, what creatures you young Guardsmen are!" said Madame Angelique, as if musing to herself, but taking very good care that the Hon. Augustus Softly should catch the words which she uttered. "I never saw such killin' men—their very looks are sufficient to conquer female hearts in a moment!"

"Where is the beauty?" asked Softly, drinking in all this pleasant flattery.

"I will go and fetch her," said Madame Angelique; and she issued from the boudoir.

Mademoiselle Armantine had passed the preceding night in the arms of a *attache* to a Foreign Embassy:—not German one, for Madame Angelique knowing very well that the German representatives of their native princes were a set of scurvy paupers, never allowed them to set foot in her establishment. The French girl was in a elegant evening toilet; and she looked ravishingly beautiful. Madame Angelique complimented her upon her bewitching appearance; and then addressed her in the ensuing manner:—

"You are already aware, my dear Armantine, that I am about to give up my business, and that I have already provided in the handsomest manner for those dear girls Eglantine and Linda. Your turn is now come; and between you and me, my dear, you are the best off. What think you of a young, handsome, and elegant officer of the Guards—exceedingly intelligent and accomplished—witty and clever—not yet of age, but able to raise as much money as he thinks fit?"

Armantine's countenance expressed her satisfaction with the proposed arrangement.

"I am glad that you are pleased," continued Madame Angelique; "and it is all the more delightful to me, inasmuch as the trouble I am taking is purely disinterested. But there are one or two little things that I must tell you my dear young friend."

She then explained the particulars of the tale which she had told the Hon. Augustus Softly,—adding, "You can safely give him the same assurances for I will take care that Marchmont shall not contradict you. I can do anything I like with the Duke; and so

for that part of the history which flattered the young officer with the idea of the violent passion you have conceived for him——”

“Trust to me to play my part properly,” interjected Armantine. “Of all men as a protector, I could best fancy an officer in the Guards!”

“He will allow you fifty guineas a week,” rejoined Madame Angelique; “and if within a twelvemonth you do not ruin him completely, it will be your own fault. My dear girl, the reputation of a young lady is never established until she has ruined three or four of her lovers. Look at your celebrated actresses——But no matter! Softly must be dying of impatience; and you must accompany me forthwith. Remember my dear, bashful tenderness and modest joy—that is your cue!”

The infamous woman thereupon conducted the pliant and willing French girl to the boudoir, and so well did Armantine play her part that the Hon. Augustus Softly was completely ravished by his presumed conquest. Madame Angelique took possession of the cheque unperceived by Armantine,—who that same evening left the establishment, to take up her new abode in the splendidly furnished lodgings which her lover had lost no time in engaging for her reception.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

AMY.

THE village of Headcorn is at no great distance from the town of Ashford in the country of Kent. About a quarter of a mile from Headcorn stood a neat little cottage in the midst of a garden; and the place was the property of an elderly woman—the widow of a small farmer who had held land in that neighbourhood. It was in this cottage that Amy Sutton, formerly lady’s-maid to the Duchess of Marchmont, was now lodging.

Some weeks had elapsed since her meeting with Christian Ashton in the train on her journey to Headcorn; and the reason which had induced the unfortunate young woman to seek this retirement, could no longer be concealed from the eyes of the world. She was in a way to become a mother.

It was in the afternoon; and Amy was seated alone in the little parlour which she occupied at the cottage. There was a work-basket on the table—but she did not work; there were books on a shelf—but she had recourse to none of them to beguile the time. She was plunged in deep thought; and the expression of her countenance would have shown to an observer, if any at the time were near, that the tenour of her reflections was of a dark ominously brooding character. She had informed Christian of the exact truth in respect to the black treachery which Marchmont had perpetrated towards her; and she was resolved on vengeance. Amy was naturally one of those disposition that, coldly implacable when once a determination of this sort was settled, exhibited no feverish impatience to carry it out until opportunity served. She would bide her time—and therefore her’s was a character all the more dangerous, and the revenge she contemplated was all the more certain to be sooner or later wreaked.

But it was not the sense of her wrongs which solely engaged her thoughts: she had to deplore the fall of a sister more beautiful than even she herself was, and whom she had loved as tenderly as her cold disposition would permit her to love at all. She had in the morning of that day received a letter from her sister; and the contents thereof intertwined themselves with the reflections that she was pursuing in regard to her own position.

The farmer’s widow was no relation to Amy Sutton: but they had become acquainted by some means which it is not worth while pausing to describe; and when Amy had found that the time was approaching when she could no longer be able to conceal her position from the world, she bethought herself of Mrs. Willis as a woman in whom she could confide, and of her rural habitation as a place where she might bring forth in seclusion the off-spring of her shame and dishonour. For in such a light does society regard the illegitimately born; although the mother may have been guiltless of wanton frailty, and merely the victim of foulest treachery—as was the case with poor Amy Sutton.

It was the afternoon, as we have said, that she was sitting in the little parlour at the cottage when her ear caught the

sound of footsteps approaching through the garden; and raising her eyes, she beheld Christian Ashton. Her first impulse was to order the servant-girl to deny her to the young gentleman: for he it recollected that when they were travelling together, she had not revealed to him the full extent of misery entailed upon her by the Duke of Marchmont's black criminality. But a second thought determined her to see him. He was already acquainted with nearly every thing that regarded her:—and of what avail to keep back the rest? Besides, in her solitude she could welcome him as an old acquaintance—almost as a friend: she knew him to be a youth of the strictest probity and honour; and there is no sorrow so desperate but that it may derive a balm, however slight and however evanescent in its effect from friendly companionship.

Christian was accordingly introduced; and with that air of frank kindness which was natural to him he proffered his hand,—saying, "I would not pass by this neighbourhood, Amy, without seeing you—although my time is not completely my own."

The unfortunate young woman had instinctively risen on the entrance of one whom she regarded as a superior; and then her condition was at once revealed to his view. His sense of delicacy as well as his generosity however prevented him from betraying that he noticed the circumstance; and in the same considerate mood he at once glided into discourse upon the current topics of the day. He was almost sorry that he had intruded upon the young woman's privacy, painfully situated as she was: but he had presented himself there with a kind motive—for the tale she had told him in the railway carriage had enlisted his sympathy on her behalf.

"You can no longer be ignorant, Mr. Ashton," Amy at length said, while her countenance was suffused with the glow of mingled shame and indignation, "of the reason which led me into this seclusion. I am unhappy—so unhappy, Mr. Ashton, that were it not for the sake of revenge I should not cling to life. But, Oh, revenge will be so sweet!—and deadly indeed shall its nature be when the proper time for wreaking it arrives!"

"Great though your wrongs have been, Amy," said Christian in a tone of

gentle remonstrance, "think you that you do well thus to keep your mind in state of incessant excitement brooding over this hoped-for vengeance?"

"It has become to the sustenance of food of existence," answered the unfortunate young woman; "and if I perish on the scaffold I will have the life of that man!" Unless indeed it be possible to wreak some vengeance which he may live to feel——"

"For heaven's sake, Amy, speak not in this dreadful manner!" exclaimed Christian. "To talk of taking the life of the Duke of Marchmont, displays a frightful recklessness in respect to your own life."

"And what have I to live for?" demanded the young woman, with even a fierce sternness. "Not for the child that will be the offspring of mingled outrage and shame! No," she added bitterly: "I loathe and abhor it ever before it is born!"

"You will think differently," said our young hero, "when the babe nestles in your bosom."

"As soon place a viper there!" ejaculated Amy Sutton. "But I was about to tell you that I *have* nothing, and *can* have nothing—save my present hope of vengeance—which binds me to life. When that is accomplished, I shall be ready to die—or in the accomplishment of it I may engulf myself!"

"But have you no relatives," asked Christian, infinitely pained as well as shocked by the language that flowed from the lip of the unfortunate young woman,—“have you no relatives who could be kind to you now, and who would have to deplore your fate if by your own madness——”

"I have one relative whom I loved—yes, still love," responded Amy, in a mournful tone,—“a very near one—a sister: but she is likewise fallen!”

"By treachery also?" asked Christian.

"No—by her own wantonness and weakness," rejoined Amy. "I will tell you a brief narrative. We two sisters were left orphans at a somewhat early age: an aunt took charge of Marion—another aunt took charge of me. The aunt who adopted Marion was the richer of the two relatives; and she gave Marion an education fitting her for the position of a lady. The aunt who took

charge of me, brought me up to a genteel servitude—namely, the position of a lady's maid. This aunt died when I was between fifteen and sixteen: I went into service—and have ever since earned my bread by mine own honest industry. My aunt taught me thrift—and I have been thrifty; or else I should not now possess the means of retiring awhile from the world—for not one single coin of the gold that the villain Marchmont offered as a recompense for his foul treachery, did I accept! But I was about to speak of Marion. It would be difficult to conceive a more lovely creature: she is indeed exquisitely beautiful—and her beauty has proved her ruin. Two years ago the aunt who had adopted her, died suddenly; and the property which she intended Marion to inherit, was swept away into the possession of strangers, through some informality in the will of the deceased. I recommended Marion to obtain a situation as a governess—for which her accomplishments fitted her. She went into a family in that capacity but in a short time she became the victim of a seducer. This was the Earl of Beltinge; and with him she lived until very recently. I thought all the while—or at least until some weeks back—that she was still in her position as a governess: for her letters gave me an assurance to that effect. On leaving the service of the Duchess of Marchmont, I went to see my sister: but instead of finding her living as a preceptress in a respectable family, I found her luxuriating in the gilded infamy which at once proclaimed itself to my comprehension. Then, in the agony of my mind, I revealed everything which related to myself—told her how I had likewise fallen, though heaven knows through no fault of mine!—and told her likewise who was the author of my ruin. Then I came hither."

Amy ceased suddenly; and Christian, much pained by the narrative which he had just heard, said in a gentle voice, "I fear from the manner in which you broke off, that you have nothing to add in respect to penitence and reformation on the part of your erring sister?"

"Alas, nothing!" responded Amy Sutton. "So far from seeking to turn into a better path, Marion has taken a downward step in the career which she is pursuing. The Earl of Beltinge

discovered that she was faithless to him; and in a moment he discarded her. Yes—mercilessly, though perhaps his severity was justifiable enough, he turned her adrift into the streets,—stripping her of every valuable and costly gem with which he had presented her during the time she was under his protection. What resource had she? The unfortunate girl found her way to a house of fashionable infamy, which is not altogether—at least in one sense—unknown to you."

"To me?" ejaculated Christian, in the most unfeigned astonishment: and then with a look of indignation, he said, "I can assure you, Miss Sutton —"

"I did not mean to offend nor to insult you," responded the young woman. "The fashionable house of infamy to which I allude is that same *Madame Angenue's*—"

"Ah, I comprehend!" cried Christian,—"the place where those dresses were made, the diabolical use of which so nearly proved fatal to the character of the Duchess of Marchmont!"

"The same," Amy replied: for the avocation of a dressmaker has been for years carried on by *Madame Angeli-que*, as a blind for the loathsome traffic which she pursues behind the scenes.

"And yet the Duchess herself patronized her at one time," observed our hero.

"Yes—but in total ignorance of the real character of that house," rejoined Amy: "and in the same manner *Madame Angeli-que* has had many lady-customers who knew not the vile nature of the woman whom they thus patronized. But as I was telling you, Marion betook herself to that abode of fashionable infamy,—where she dwelt for a short time. There she occasionally met Marchmont; and he, little suspecting that she was my sister, made overtures, which of course she invariably rejected. She left that house the day before yesterday. I have received a letter from her this morning: she tells me that she is now under the protection of a man whose name was at once familiar to me, and will be familiar enough to you. I mean *Wilson Stanhope*."

"The villain!" ejaculated Christian. "I have more reasons than one for loathing and abhorring that unprincipled

man! He grossly insulted my sister—he lent himself, as you are aware, to the iniquitous designs of the Duke of Marchmont—and he insulted one likewise,” added our hero, thinking of his well-beloved Isabella, “who is as dear to me as that affectionate and cherished sister to whom I have just alluded.”

“Yes: Marion,” continued Amy, “is now under the protection of that man; and singular enough is it that through the Duke of Marchmont’s agency this change in her circumstances has been brought about. I am as yet unacquainted with all the particulars: Marion had not time to describe them yesterday—she will write to me again to-day—and to-morrow I shall know all.”

“But is it possible,” exclaimed Christian, shocked at the impression which Amy’s statement had just left upon his mind, “that your sister can accept boons at the hands of him who has done such foul wrong unto yourself?”

Amy Sutton did not immediately answer our hero’s question: but she looked at him hard in the face with a peculiar expression—and then said, “The unfortunate Marion is not so deeply depraved nor so lost to every good feeling, that she is indifferent enough to her sister’s wrongs as to accept favours from the author of them. No, Mr. Ashton! She will succour me in the pursuance of my revenge, if opportunity may serve; and from something which she hints in her letter, there is a chance that her services may prove thus available. But, Oh! if Marion could but be reclaimed—it is this that dwells in my mind! And now, after all I have told you of the degradation of my sister, and with your knowledge of my own shame and dishonour, I ask what have I worth living for—unless it be for revenge—and wherefore should I continue to cling to life when once that revenge is accomplished?”

Christian endeavoured to reason with the young woman in a proper manner: but she was deaf to all his remonstrances—her mind was evidently settled upon the wreaking a deadly vengeance of some sort against the Duke of Marchmont; and our hero saw with pain and sorrow that no friendly argument could

pivot her from her course. He therefore at length rose to depart.

“I have not as yet explained,” he said, “the precise motive of my visit; and from something which you yourself let drop, it may be unnecessary to make the offer which I had originally intended. Judging from all you told me in the railway carriage some weeks back, I fancied that you purposed to retire into some seclusion here: and not knowing how you might be situated in a financial point of view——”

“A thousand thanks, Mr. Ashton,” responded Amy,—“but I have sufficient for all my purposes. Though declining this generous offer, I am not the less sensible of your well-meant kindness—and I shall be for ever grateful.”

Christian took his departure; and returning to the station, he proceeded by the next train to London. On his arrival in the British metropolis, he repaired straight to Mrs. Macaulay’s house in Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square; and Mrs. Macaulay in person opened the front door to receive him.

“Well, my dear Mr. Ashton, it is quite an age since I saw you!” exclaimed the lodging-housekeeper, with her blindest smiles and most amiable looks. “Where have you been for the last two months? But, dear me! how you are improving—and what a fine handsome young man you are growing! A lady of my age may pay you such a compliment, you know. But pray walk in. Your room is all ready for your reception. I have got rid of that odious old couple who used to lock up their tea-caddy and decant their wine for themselves. Would you believe it, Mr. Ashton?—they went away without so much as giving the maid a single shilling for herself; and they took off with them the leg and wring of a fowl which they had for the previous day’s dinner!”

“My room is ready for me, you say?” exclaimed Christian in astonishment.

“Yes—to be sure!” responded Mrs. Macaulay. “Did not Mr. Redcliffe tell you in his letter——”

“He merely told me that immediately on my arrival in London I was to come to him, and that I need not take up my abode previously at any tavern or lodging-house.”

To be sure not! ejaculated Mrs. Macaulay. “And where was your shrewdness, my dear Mr. Ashton, when you failed to comprehend that Mr.

entered a few months back in a state of dependence upon her uncle—she has gone to it as its mistress!”

“Such is the mutability of human affairs,” observed Mr. Redcliffe solemnly. “But proceed, my dear Christian.”

“It was originally arranged,” continued our young hero, “that I should remain at Verner House until this morning; and therefore, even if this morning’s post had not brought me your kind letter, I should have returned to the metropolis to-day. Rest assured, my dear sir, that I was most anxious to obey your summons with all possible despatch; but still I could not help halting for an hour by the way to visit an unfortunate creature—a victim of the Duke of Marchmont’s!”

“Ah!,” ejaculated Redcliffe; “when will this man’s crimes cease to display themselves to me at every step? when will his career of iniquity be ended?”

“Never I fear,” responded Christian, “until his existence itself ceases.”

Our hero then, at Mr. Redcliffe’s request, narrated everything he had heard from the lips of the unfortunate young woman—not even omitting the painful episode in respect to her sister Marion. Mr. Redcliffe listened with the deepest attention; and when the youth’s narrative was brought to termination, Mr. Redcliffe addressed him in the following manner:—

“My dear Christian, from everything that you have told me, I deduce evidences of your right principles, the generosity of your disposition, and the intrinsic excellence of your character. At the very first I experienced such an interest in your behalf—indeed such an attachment towards yourself and your sister, that I should have at once proposed to place you in a condition of independence: but I felt how much better it was to leave you eat the bread of industry for a time. I have kept my eye upon you; and I have also been aware that your sister was most comfortably situated under the friendly care of the Princess of Inderabad. The period has now arrived when you must no longer be left to shift for yourself in the world. I am a lone man, Christian—this you already know—you may think too that my habits are peculiar, my manners eccentric—and if for a single moment you doubt whether you can be happy beneath the same roof

with myself, you shall be provided for elsewhere—until such time when——”

Mr. Redcliffe hesitated for a few instants; and the expression of some strong emotion passed over his countenance. He then added, “Until such time that your beautiful Isabella’s period of mourning shall be ended and you may accompany her to the altar.”

Again Mr. Redcliffe paused: he rose from his seat—paced twice to and fro in the apartment—and returning to his chair, said, “Think not, my dear Christian, that when the day of your marriage arrives, you will find Miss Vincent to the altar as a dependent on her own fortune. No!—you shall have wealth, Christian—rest assured that you shall have wealth—and at least as an equal shall you lead her to that altar. Perhaps perhaps——”

But Mr. Redcliffe stopped short; and our young hero, throwing himself at the feet of his benefactor, took his hand and pressed it to his lips. Mr. Redcliffe, who was profoundly affected, smoothed down the curling masses of Christian’s raven hair,—at the same time murmuring, “My dear boy, there is nothing that I will not do for yourself and your sister!”

Christian hastened to assure his benefactor that so far from desiring to separate from him, or to live elsewhere, it would give him the utmost pleasure to dwell beneath the same roof.

“So be it, for the present,” answered Mr. Redcliffe. “As for Christian, let her remain where she is: it is impossible that she can be in better companionship, or with a kinder friend. I have long known the Princess Indora—But enough, Christian! Let your sister continue to dwell with her Highness—until——”

And again Mr. Redcliffe stopped short, as if every instant he were afraid that in the excitement of his feelings he should be betrayed into the utterance of something more than he might choose to reveal. But our young hero was himself too full of varied emotions to perceive, much less to suspect the precise nature of those that were agitating his benefactor; and again was his heartfelt gratitude poured forth to Mr. Redcliffe.

This gentleman now said to our hero, “Tell me, Christian, everything connected with your earlier years: reveal to me in fullest detail all that regards

yourself and your sister, from your most infantile recollections down to the period when I first became acquainted with you in London. Do not think it is mere idle curiosity on my part: but I feel so deep an interest in your amiable sister and yourself, that everything which in any way concerns you is of importance in my estimation."

Christian proceeded to comply with his benefactor's request: his narrative was however concise enough, and was speedily told.

"To-morrow," said Mr. Redcliffe, "immediately after breakfast you shall go and fetch your sister to pass the day with us. I will give you a note for the Princess Indora, so that her assent shall at once be conceded. Ah! and request your sister, my dear Christian, to bring with her those little relics to which you have just alluded in your narrative: for, as I have said, everything that regards you has an interest in my eyes—and—and I have a curiosity to see those cherished objects which belonged to your deceased mother, and which your uncle Mr. Ashton placed in your hands when you were both old enough to receive possession of them and to appreciate it."

We need not further extend the description of his touching and pathetically exciting scene which took place between Mr. Redcliffe and our hero. Suffice it to say that the remainder of the evening was passed in most friendly conversation on the part of the benefactor and the recipient of his bounties; so that when Christian retired to his couch, he had every reason to relish himself upon this evening as being one of the happiest and most fortunate in his somewhat chequered existence.

Immediately after breakfast in the morning, Christian repaired to the villa of the Princess Indora; and on arriving there, he was most fervently embraced by his loving and delighted sister. From the Princess he experienced a most cordial welcome; and such was the state of his own feelings, with all his present prospects of happiness, that he did not perceive how for a moment Indora trembled, and how the colour went and came on her magnificent countenance, as he presented to her Clement Redcliffe's letter. She retired to another apartment to peruse it; and the twins were left alone together. Then Christian informed his sister of

everything that had taken place between himself and Mr. Redcliffe on the preceding evening; and our heroine was infinitely rejoiced to see that her beloved brother need no longer consider himself dependent on the precarious chances of employment for the means of subsistence.

By the time Christian's explanation were finished, the Princess of Indora returned to the room where she had left them together; and Her Highness once intimated to Christian that it was with infinite pleasure she granted the request conveyed in Mr. Redcliffe's note. But if the twins had been more accustomed to penetrate into the human heart—if they had more curiosity in studying the looks of individuals—the might have suspected that there was more in Mr. Redcliffe's billet than mere request that Christiana might be spared for the day; they would have fancied there was something which was of a peculiar interest and importance to the Indian lady likewise.

While on their way in a hired vehicle from Bayswater to Mortimer Street, the twins had leisure for additional explanations. Christian made his delighted sister acquainted with the change that had taken place in respect to Isabella Vincent—how she had become possessed of an immense fortune—and now in her altered position she had renewed the assurances of love and constancy towards our hero. And then Christian recited, in fuller details than she had written to her brother when he was a Ramsgate, the particulars of the outrage she had undergone when she was forcibly carried off from the villa, and when she was rescued by Lord Octavian Meredith. The artless girl concealed nothing: she explained to her brother all that had occurred between herself and the young nobleman; and while Christian expressed his approval of the course she had adopted, he could not help saying to her in a low, tender, compassionate voice, "I am afraid, my sweet sister that your affections are indeed more or less centred in Lord Octavian?"

"Christian," replied the weeping blushing girl, "I have striven—heaven alone can tell how I have striven—to banish that image from my mind; and I have not been able! I have prayed to God to succour and uphold me in my task: but my very prayers have seemed to impress that image all the more

forcibly on the memory of your unhappy sister. I should deem myself very guilty, were it not that I know that we poor weak mortals have no power over volition—and all that we can do is to prevent such circumstances as these from leading us into error.

"Error, my dearest sister!" exclaimed Christian: "mention not that word in connexion with your own pure and virtuous self!"

Christina pressed her brother's hand in token of gratitude for the confidence he thus reposed in her, and of which she knew herself to be so completely worthy; and then she said in a tremulous hesitating voice, "Must I to Mr. Redcliffe make all these revelations?"

Christian did not immediately answer: he reflected profoundly. At length he said, "No, my sweet sister—these are matters too sacred to be discussed save and except with a very near and dear relative. Mr. Redcliffe is my benefactor,—and nothing more. I love him—we must both love him: and if he should demand your fullest confidence in all and every respect, even to your most secret thoughts—*then* must you speak frankly. But not of your own accord, dear Christina, need you volunteer explanations: it would be with unnecessary spontaneity inflicting pain upon yourself. Ah! I recollect, in reference to that outrage which made my blood boil, dearest Christina—I wrote to Mr. Redcliffe from Ramsgate, telling him what had happened, immediately after the receipt of your letter describing the circumstances: for I have constantly been in the habit of thus communicating with him who has now proved so generous a benefactor. He assured me last night that he is not ignorant who the vile authoress of the outrage was, and that she will be punished for that and other offences which have come to his knowledge."

The vehicle now stopped at Mrs. Macaulay's house; and that female herself came forth to welcome Christina.

"Dear me, Miss Ashton!" exclaimed the garrulous landlady, "how wonderfully you have improved since last I saw you! I was telling your brother yesterday that he too had improved: but really in respect to yourself——"

"My dear Mrs. Macaulay," said Christina, smiling and blushing, "you are pleased to compliment me: but can assure you——"

"Oh, no compliment at all!" interjected the garrulous landlady: "you are the most beautiful creature that ever honoured the threshold of my house by crossing it. Ah! and there is that odious Mrs. Sifkin looking out of her parlour-window—and she will be ready to eat her own head off with spite at seeing such an elegant young gentleman and such a charming young lady entering at my door."

"Rather an impossible feat for Mrs. Sifkin to perform—is it not, Mrs. Macaulay?" observed Christian, smiling good-naturedly; "and certainly one for transcending the importance of occasion."

"Oh, you know not the spite of that odious woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Macaulay. "It was but the other day she told Mrs. Bunkley, which does my mangle—Ah! I forgot," ejaculated the worthy woman, suddenly interrupting herself, "I have such news for you! Only look here—in yesterday's paper, amongst the list of Bankrupts—Mr. Samuel Emmanuel of the great Clothing Emporium! Gone all to smashes—and serve him right! That great coarse vulgar looking wife of his won't be hung with massive gold chains any more, like a turkey with sausages at Christmas. But I see that you are in a hurry: and Mr. Redcliffe is waiting anxiously for you both."

Mrs. Macaulay—who had hitherto barred the way in the passage, that she might indulge in her garrulous propensities and have this little chat with the twins—now stepped aside; and they were enabled to pass her. They ascended to Mr. Redcliffe's sitting apartment, where Christina experienced the kindest welcome from that gentleman. After a little conversation Mr. Redcliffe inquired whether she had brought with her those memorials of her long deceased mother which through Christian, he had expressed a wish to behold?

"Yes," answered our heroine, with a tone and look of tender sadness, as she produced a small casket of oriental workmanship, and which was one of the numerous gifts she had received from the Princess of Inderabad,

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Mr. Redcliffe took the casket from her hand—and opened it with as reverential an air as the twins themselves could have displayed when proceeding to the contemplation of memorials that so intimately concerned themselves. First he drew forth a long tress which we have described in an earlier chapter of this narrative as of a luxuriant mass which might have formed the glory of a queen—aye, or the envy of a queen!—and while he surveyed it with a long and earnest attention, the brother and sister instinctively wound their arms about each other's hand, as they exchanged looks of unspeakable fondness. Then Mr. Redcliffe drew forth from the casket a beautiful gold watch of delicate fashion and exquisite workmanship; and as he contemplated it, the tears trickled down his cheeks.

"He feels for us," whispered Christian to his sister: "this excellent kind-hearted man—the most generous benefactor we have ever known—feels for our orphan condition."

"Yes—Mr. Redcliffe can appreciate," responded Christina, "the feelings with which you and I, dear brother, have been wont to gaze for hours and hours on the memorials of a mother who was snatched from us ere we had intelligence to comprehend her loss!"

Clement Redcliffe now opened another little packet which he took from the casket; and this packet contained two rings. One has been already described as a wedding-ring: the other, likewise a lady's, was of no considerable value out of exquisite workmanship. And now Mr. Redcliffe proceeded to the window with these two rings; and as he contemplated them, his back was turned towards the orphans. There he remained for at least five minutes—motionless as a statue—with his eyes evidently riveted upon the rings; and the orphans did not approach him. They still felt persuaded that in the goodness of his heart he was deeply touched on their account, while surveying these relics of their long dead mother. It was altogether a scene of the most pathetic interest; and the tears were trickling down the beautifully handsome face of Christian and the sweetly beautiful countenance of Christina.

Mr. Redcliffe at length turned slowly away from the window. His complexion, which has been described as being made

up of sallowness bronzed with the sun now appeared of a dead white: his face was indeed ghastly pale. That cold stern look which he habitually wore and which was almost saturnine, chilling the beholder who was accustomed to it—had totally disappeared, and was succeeded by one of the deepest melancholy: but it was a mournfulness that had something awfully solemn in it. He advanced towards the twins; and taking their hands he said, in a voice that was scarcely audible, "My dear children—for as such I mean to look upon you henceforth—I can weep with you over those memorials of the mother who died in your infancy! You love and revere her memory—Oh! never fail thus to cherish—thus to cling to it!—for it is sweet to think of a departed parent who is now a saint in heaven!"

At the same moment the same idea struck the twins;—simultaneously too were their looks bent in eager anxious inquiry upon Mr. Redcliffe's countenance: and their lips gave utterance at the same moment to precisely the same words.

"Our mother—did you know her?"

Mr. Redcliffe turned aside—raised his hand to his brow—and for an instant seemed to stagger as if under the influence of a hurricane of memories sweeping through his brain. The orphans watched him with a still more earnest gaze—a still more anxious interest than before: for they felt as if they stood upon the threshold of hitherto unanticipated revealings.

"Yes—I knew her," slowly responded Mr. Redcliffe, again turning towards the brother and sister: "I knew your poor mother! It is this circumstance, my dear children, which inspires me with so vivid an interest on your behalf—But you must ask me no questions at present—I can tell you nothing more yet! The time may shortly come when—But do not press me now! Above all things, breathe not a syllable elsewhere of what has taken place between us! Let it be sufficient for you to know that in me you have found one who will watch over your interests—who will study your welfare—and who will be unto you both as a friend, a father!"

Mr. Redcliffe folded the twins in his arms, and wept over them. They knelt at his feet, murmuring forth in broken voices the expressions of their

gratitude: for it was sweet indeed—Ah, it was sweet for this youthful brother and sister to possess the friendship, the guardianship, and the love of one who had known to their mother! He raised them up from their kneeling posture: again he embraced them both; and then relocking the casket, he said to Christina, "Keep you these valuables, my dear girl, with the most sedulous care!—keep them, I say, not merely as the memorials of your deceased mother, but as objects which may sooner or later prove of importance in another sense."

"Will you keep them for us?" asked both the twins, speaking as it were in the same breath.

Mr. Redcliffe reflected for a moment: and then he said, "Yes, I will keep them!—but I hope and trust it will only be for a short while that I may thus feel it safer to take charge of these valuables—and then shall they be restored unto you. Ask me nothing more now—and let us turn the conversation upon other subjects."

Mr. Redcliffe hastened to lock up the casket in a secure place; and the remainder of the day was passed by himself and the orphans with that affectionate and friendly intercourse which naturally followed the scenes that had taken place, and the new light in which they respectively stood—namely, he as their guardian and protector, and they as the grateful recipients of his kindness and his bounty.

CHAPTER XC.

THE SMEDLEYS AGAIN.

WE must once more request the reader to accompany us to the Smedley's habitation situated in one of those narrow streets which lie between the lower parts of the Waterloo and Westminster Roads. The house had precisely the same appearance as when we first described it in an earlier chapter of this narrative—with the difference that there was a neatly written card in one of the windows announcing lodgings to let. The brass plate on the front door indicating the avocation of Mr Smedley as a gold-beater, was well polished, as was its

wont: the gilt arm, clutching the hammer to its fast as a farther illustration of that individual's calling was equally resplendent. The two windows of the first floor had their dark mullion curtains and their white blinds as usual; and Mr. Smedley himself was as constant an attendant at the chapel next door as when we first introduced him to our reader.

"It was evening—and Mr. and Mrs. Smedley were seated together in their little parlour on the ground floor. There was a bottle of spirits upon the table; and the somewhat inflamed countenance of Bab Smedley showed that she had been indulging in her predilection for strong waters. Not however that she had imbibed thereof so copiously on the present occasion as to affect her reason—but only sufficient to render her somewhat sharper and more querulous in her observations to her husband. They were discussing the circumstances of their position, and deliberating on the plans which they ought to adopt: but it was in low whispering voices that they for the most part addressed each other.—though every now and then the woman's ejaculations became louder with the petulant impatience of her utterance; and then Jack Smedley would interpose a timid and hasty "Hush!"

Presently Mrs. Smedley consulting her husband's silver watch which lay upon the table, said, "It is close upon nine o'clock, Jack: you must be off with that money."

"And I will just take a few of those religious tracts," said Smedley, rising from his seat: "because if I happen to be seen putting anything into those chaps' hands, and if any question is asked, I can easily declare that it was one of these godly publications."

"Be off with you, with your godly publications!" ejaculated Bab Smedley with an air of supreme disgust: and she forthwith proceeded to mix herself another glass of spirits and water.

Jack Smedley wrapped a pound's worth of silver in a piece of paper, and deposited the little packet in his waistcoat pocket. He took a handful of the religious tracts; and saying to his wife, "When I come back we will continue our deliberations,"—he issued from the house.

Glancing hastily up and down the narrow street with the anxious look of a

"Are you the mistress of the house?" asked the individual, with a bow that was sufficiently polite.

"I am, sir," responded Bab,—and the master too, for that matter!" she thought within herself: for she experienced an unmitigated contempt for her husband, and the feeling was inseparable from her ideas.

"Can I say a few words to you!" asked the stranger.

"To be sure!" replied Mrs. Smedley, leyl, without however making the slightest move as an invitation for the individual to enter.

"You have lodging to let!" he said; but looking about him as much as to imply that he would rather speak to her in-doors.

"We had, sir," Mrs. Smedley immediately responded; "but they were let this afternoon to a very respectable old couple that have known us for a great many years."

"And yet the bill is still up in the window?" said the applicant, stepping back a pace or two to assure himself by another glance that such was the fact.

"Oh, is it?" said Mrs. Smedley coolly. Then I forgot to take it down—and I will be so at once. I am sorry you should have had the trouble, sir——"

"Oh, no trouble! But perhaps you may have a spare room—I only want one——"

"No spare room now, sir. Good evening to you:"—and Bab Smedley shut the door in the face of the applicant, who seemed much inclined to keep her in discourse.

She returned into the parlour, and at once took down the card announcing that lodgings were to be let. She evidently did not much like the visit: and reseating herself, fell into a gloomy reverie, which was only occasionally interrupted by a recurrence to the spirits and water. In about twenty minutes after the little incident we have described, Jack Smedley returned; and Bab at once vented her ill-humour upon him.

"What was the use of your keeping that card stuck up in the window? I told you more than once that I would not have it; and yet——"

"But, my dear Bab, do here reason!" interrupted her husband, as he resumed his seat at the table.

"Yes—when you can talk it, and not before!" exclaimed the vigaro. "But what have you done?"

"Those hungry dogs," responded Jack, "were at the place of appointment, waiting for their weekly money; and I told them where to be the next time it falls due. But don't you think Bab it is a very hard thing we should have to allow these fellows a pound a week——"

"How can we help ourselves?" demanded Mrs. Smedley. "Isn't there a warrant out for Bill Scott's apprehension? and isn't he therefore obliged to play at hide-and-seek? and if his brother Tim was to go out priggling in order to keep them both, wouldn't he be dogged and followed, so that Bill would be certain to be arrested? there's no doubt it's hard enough upon us—but we can't help ourselves. As for that card there——"

"Now do listen, Bab!" said her husband entreatingly. "When that cursed business at Liverpool exploded, and your mother got into her present trouble, weren't we obliged to do all we could to keep up the appearance of our own respectability? Didn't we assure the neighbours that it was totally impossible Mrs. Webber could have committed the deed—that there was some terrible mistake—and that her innocence would transpire on the trial?"

"And the neighbours don't believe us," interjected Bab, sullenly.

"No—I'm sorry to say they don't altogether believe us," responded her husband; "or at least don't know exactly what to think. They speak cool and look distant: but I do my best to ride it with a high hand, and seem as if I did not notice their altered behaviour. Well, I advised that the card should be kept up in the window as if we were at least conscious of our own innocence. Besides, the keeping up of the card was only a blind: for we agreed that we would not let the lodgings even if anybody applied: because you and I have always so many things to talk about now, and we must not stand the chance of being overheard. And then too, the Barker may turn up at any moment—for Barney is such a desperate fellow, he's almost certain to find his way to London—and if he does, he would be sure to come to us, the worst luck on it!"

"There's enough!" ejaculated Mrs. Smedley. "Some one has been to apply for the lodgings; and I don't like his appearance a bit, I can tell you."

"Who?" asked the goldbeater, with a look full of startled anxiety.

"Ah! who?" ejaculated Bab. "How do I know? But who should come prying about this place here, and trying on all sorts of dodges to get in amongst us for more reasons than one——"

"Do you—do you think he was a—detective?" asked Jack Smedley, with an awful elongation of his pale countenance.

"As like as not!" rejoined Bab petulantly. "However, I stalled him off—I told him the lodgings were let to a decent old couple—I was precious short with him—and I shut the door. Now, the fact is, Jack, things can't go on like this: I am getting uncommon tired of living constantly on the idgets——"

"Not more tired than me, I know!" exclaimed her husband. "Didn't I propose a bolt to France immediately after your mother got into trouble? But it was you that said we must stick here at all hazards; and when we decided to remain, I did the best I could to keep up a show of respectability——"

"Of course I said we would remain!" ejaculated Mrs. Smedley. "Do you think that the house wasn't constantly watched after mother went down to Liverpool to Lettice Rodney's trial? And it would have been madness for us to have thought of a move—suspicion would have been excited in a moment. But after that girl Rodney's trial things looked better for us—though they went so dead against mother——"

"Yes—I know the detective said at Lettice Rodney's trial," observed Jack Smedley, "that he had nothing to allege against *our* respectability."

"Well, then," continued Bab, "it was better for us to go on living here: but when two or three weeks back people began asking how it was that the old lodger of our's disappeared so suddenly in the winter——"

"Ah! that was the thing that began to frighten me too," interjected the goldbeater; "and then came the news of the *Burker's* escape, and the fright we've been in lest he should come here

to get us both into such trouble that we could never hope to get out of it——"

"That is nothing," interrupted Bab, "in comparison with the other thing we were speaking about before you went out to meet those Scotts."

"Ah! you mean your mother?" said Jack Smedley, with a significant look, at the same time that he drew his chair closer to his wife. "Do you—do you really think," he asked, with a very pale face, "that the old woman is likely to peach?"

"I didn't think so at first," answered Bab—"or else I shouldn't have insisted that we were to remain here. But lately, the more I've thought over the matter the more I am convinced there is every thing to be dreaded in that quarter. There's no use disguising the fact, Jack—you never was a favourite with mother: and as for any love for me, her daughter—it's all nonsense! If she thought she could do herself any good by turning round upon us and telling how two or three have gone down there——"

"Yes, yes—I know!" said Jack Smedley shuddering, as his wife pointed in a downward direction. "But the quicklime——"

"Well, the quicklime has no doubt done its work long ago," interrupted Bab, "even in respect to that man Smith—or Preston, I should say——"

"By the bye," interrupted Jack, "what have you done with his letter—you know—and also the packet of papers we took out from under the flooring of his house in Cambridge Terrace?"

"Never mind the papers!" exclaimed Bab petulantly: "I have put them where they are safe enough—though little use they ever stand the chance of being to us or our affairs: for when we made secret inquiries about those young Ashtons, we heard they were living in a wretched poor lodging in Camden Town, and hadn't the means of rewarding any one who would give them up those papers. It has been of no use to make any inquiries since: for it is not very likely their condition is much improved. But let us return to what we were saying——"

"Yes—about your mother?" suggested Jack Smedley.

"Well then, about my mother," continued Bab, "You know what my

opinion is—I tell you that mother will peach if it answers her purpose. She has not sent us any reply to the two or three letters we have written, and which I so carefully worded that she could not fail to understand the game we had to play——”

“Perhaps she is offended,” observed Jack Smedley, “at our writing in that sort of sanctimonious strain?”

“Offended?—nonsense!” exclaimed Bab. “How could she be offended? She knows very well that we must be aware all letters going to her would be opened by the gaol authorities, and that we were therefore compelled to write in a particular way. But never mind all this!—it is of no use arguing the point. I tell you that if mother lives on to go through her trial and be condemned to death, she will peach as sure as you are Jack Smedley!”

“If she lives?” said the man, catching at those words which appeared to have some covert meaning.

“Yes—if she lives,” answered Bab, repeating those words. “And therefore she must *not* live—and if you are a man, Jack——”

“I am man enough to do anything to secure our safety,” responded the goldbeater. “Only show me how——”

“Now look you!” replied Bab: “I understand mother well enough—and a great deal better than you do. She would like to put herself out of the way before the trial comes on—of that I am convinced! But if the trial is once over, and she is condemned to death, and the croaking parsons get hold of her, you may depend upon it she will out with everything!”

“Then what is to be done?” asked Jack Smedley.

“What is to be done?” echoed his wife, with an air of mingled impatience and contempt: “what *should* be done but for you to——” and she whispered a few words in the ears of her husband.

“But would you have me do this?” he asked, gazing upon her as if he thought that she could scarcely be in earnest, or that she meant to put him to a test for some other and ulterior purpose.

“Of course I would!” rejoined the fiendlike woman: “everything for our own safety! Let what will happen to the Barker, we know that he is staunch; and I feel convinced that nothing could induce him to turn round

upon his pals. The more savage and ferocious a person is, the more sure is he or she to be true to friends and associates. As for those Scotts—we will get them safe out of the country, and then, if once mother is put out of the way, we have got little or nothing to fear.

“Well, I don’t know,” said Jack Smedley, in a sort of dismayed musing—“I had a very bad dream last night. I thought the black cat was scouring all over the house—that some strange man came in to look after her—that she cut down stairs into the scullery—hid herself underneath the table—and therefore sate right upon that trap-door——”

“Stuff and nonsense, with your black cats!” cried Bab Smedley.

“Just wait a moment,” interposed Jack. “I thought that the strange man went down into the scullery—found the cat there—discovered the trap-door—and then all in an instant turned into a policeman. But you know, Bab, that the night we did that last piece of business—I mean Preston’s affair—the cat did cut about the house in such a strange way that I told you at the time I didn’t like it: it seemed an omen of evil. But really,” asked Jack abruptly, “what is to prevent us from making a bolt now? Why not get over to France? We may then dispense with this new business about your mother—we need not care what happens to the Barker—and we shall no longer have to pension those Scotts.”

And what if the police have their eye upon us?” demanded Mrs. Smedley: “what if that man who came to night is a detective who wants to get into the house under pretence of being a lodger, that he may all the better play the spy upon us? I tell you I am certain that if we were to make such a move as would show we intended flight, we should both be pounced upon at once on some pretence or another. It is only by staying here, and seeming to rely on our respectability, that we are safe. The police are evidently puzzled about us: they don’t know what to think—they fancy we may be all right—and as long as we give them no cause to think otherwise, we are safe. They may try by all kinds of dodges to know more of us and peer into our secrets: but there’s no chance of their going to the length of laying hands upon

us. We must therefore use the opportunity we now have to get rid of obstacles and overcome perils—so as to make ourselves completely safe. Now, that is my view of the matter—and it *must* be acted upon,” added Bab peremptorily.

“But what if I go to Liverpool?” asked Jack, considerably re-assured, though not completely so, by his wife’s arguments.

“Natural enough!” she exclaimed,—“to see your mother-in-law—to remonstrate with her on her wickedness if she is guilty—to console and strengthen her if she is innocent! Will those reasons, do, Jack? Come now, you have played the sanctimonious long enough amongst those snivelling, canting, whining hypocrites next door”—alluding to the chapel—“to be able to perform the same part with great effect at Liverpool. Take a clean white cravat with you—put on your longest face—and don’t fear as to the result. What you require is fortunately in the house—”

“How?” exclaimed Smedley.

“The phial of prussic acid,” rejoined his wife. “Don’t you remember, we found it amongst Preston’s effects? Forger as he was, and always trembling at the idea of being arrested, he no doubt had the poison in readiness for any moment. It is lucky for our present purpose; because it would otherwise be dangerous for you just now to go out and buy it.”

We need not chronicle any more of the discourse which took place between his delectable husband and wife: suffice it to say that everything was settled between them for the carrying out of their nefarious purpose. At an early hour in the morning Jack Smedley went amongst two or three of his neighbours, with the intimation that he was going to Liverpool to see his mother-in-law; and he officiously undertook to execute whatsoever commissions they might choose to charge him with. He however received cold and distant responses, to which he had been lately accustomed: but his resent purpose was answered—he had openly declared his intention of visiting Liverpool—and if there were really police spies in the neighbourhood, they could not think that he meditated a fatal flight altogether.

To Liverpool Mr. Smedley repaired: and in the evening he arrived in that town. It was too late for him to see his mother-in-law: but on the following morning, at the earliest hour permitted by the prison regulations, he was introduced into her cell. He found the old woman still in bed; and when he made his appearance, she surveyed him with looks of mingled spite, mistrust, and aversion.

“Well, mother-in-law,” said Jack, when the turnkey had retired, “as you didn’t write to us, Bab and I thought the best thing to be done was for me to run down and see you.”

“I wish I had never seen you at all!” answered Mrs. Webber growlingly,—“never in all my life! It was you who concocted this precious business that has got me into such trouble; and, O dear! O dear! to think how it will end—to think how it will end!”

The wretched woman sat up in bed, and rocked herself to and fro as she thus spoke. She was frightfully altered. Thin and emaciated, she was worn almost to a skeleton not by remorse for the crimes she had committed—but with horror at the incessant contemplation of the penalty she would soon have to pay for them. There was something fearful in the expression of her countenance: she seemed like a starved tiger-cat that could have sprung at any one approaching, as if to avenge the doom that appeared certain to overtake herself. Jack Smedley was frightened by her look—while her words seemed to justify all the misgivings which her daughter Barbara had entertained concerning her.

“Come, mother-in-law,” he said plucking up his presence of mind as well as he was able; “don’t be angry with me—I did all for the best.”

“And the worst has come of it!” interjected Mrs. Webber sharply; “and I have got to bear all its brunt. I tell you what, Jack,” she went on to say, her eyes glaring with fierceness upon him,—“those who commit crimes in concert, should also share the punishment in concert: or else there’s no fairness and no justice! I feel as if I was made a scapegoat of—”

“Nonsense, mother-in-law!” exclaimed Jack Smedley. “When people embark in these sort of things, they each and all take their fair and equal chance. It might have happened to

Bab—it might have happened to me—”

“You: you white livered scoundrel!” ejaculated Mrs. Webber, with a look of withering contempt: you would have turned round and peached on all the rest the very first instant. Bab too is as selfish as she can be. Look at the letters you have both written me!—full of that canting nonsense of your’s the infection of which Bab seems to have caught!”

“How could we write otherwise?” asked Smedley. “Come, do be reasonable, mother-in-law—”

“Reasonable indeed!” cried the wretched woman. “am I not in a state that is enough to drive one mad? You and my daughter are all for yourselves—you wrote to me when you should have come—”

“The house was watched by the police,” interjected Smedley: “and therefore—”

“How is it, then, that you are here now?” demanded Mrs. Webber sharply: “and what devil’s business has brought you to me? Can you help me to escape, Jack?—can you with all your art and cunning set me free, as the *Burker* has liberated himself?”

“If it were possible,” responded Smedley, “I should—”

“Possible!” cried Mrs. Webber, contemptuously. “Nothing is possible with you, except sneaking villany and covert cowardly crime. But anything bold—no, nothing of the sort! Look you, Jack Smedley—if I go to the scaffold it shall not be alone!”

“Mother-in-law!” he ejaculated vehemently.

“Hold your tongue, and listen! Companionship is always sweet—and not the less so in death. At all events it will be a consolation for me to know that I am not the most miserable person in existence at that last instant!”

“But mother-in-law,” faltered forth Jack Smedley, with a countenance white as a sheet, “would you hang your own daughter?”

“She leaves me here to be hanged!” retorted the woman fiercely: “she does not come near me!”

“She has sent you plenty of money, mother-in-law,” interposed Jack in accents of remonstrance and deprecation.

“Yes—to fee counsel in a hopeless cause!” cried Mrs. Webber. “I tell you what it is—I feel in that state of

mind that I could wreak a vengeance upon the whole world!—all the bounds of kith and kin are broken!—I know nobody but enemies! That is my state of mind! And if you had the gibbering looming ever before your eyes—if you had a sensation as of a cord ever round your neck—if you had night and day a look death in the face—you, Jack Smedley, would feel even worse than I do. It is enough to drive one crazy—crazed—crazed!”

Again the old woman rocked herself to and fro; and her son-in-law felt as if his purpose were completely frustrated. He knew not what to say next: there was a perfect consternation in his mind: he thought that she might even denounce him as the accomplice of her numerous crimes, the instant the turnkey should come back to conduct him away from her cell.

“Jack Smedley,” she said, at length breaking a somewhat long pause, “tell me for what purpose you have come here now. If I thought it was to serve me in any way—if I thought you had the courage to furnish me the means of escape—”

“Tell me what those means are, mother-in-law,” quickly ejaculated the goldbeater; “and I promise you they shall be forthcoming. Do you want a file—a crowbar—a rope-ladder—”

“Fool!” interrupted the old woman with bitterest scorn, “how can I, poor weak feeble creature, reduced to the mere shadow of what I was,—how can I accomplish that which a strong powerful determined man, as the *Burker*, could only just succeed in effecting? No—it is not by such means as those that I may escape hence! But there is something which will enable me to evade the ordeal of trial—the horror of condemnation—aye, and the last hideous frightful scene which shudder to contemplate! And more too—it is something that will save me from the horrible chance of betraying my own daughter in my madness!”

“And that something?” ejaculated Smedley, with the almost breathless eagerness of suspense.

Mrs. Webber looked very hard at him for nearly a minute; and then a word—a single word—came in a slow whisper from her lips—a word which made her son-in-law start suddenly, although what she had previously said had more than half prepared him for the climax

And that one word was—"Poison!" "Do you mean it, mother-in-law?" he asked, clutching her wrist and looking her intently in the face.

"I mean it!" she responded. "But of what use," was her immediate contemptuous addition, "is it for me to make such a request, since I already see that your craven heart—"

"Enough, mother-in-law!—you do not understand me," hurriedly whispered the gold beater. "I have poison with me!"

"Poison with you?" she echoed, a wild joy flashing forth in unearthly light from her eyes. "Is it possible? But how? You are not deceiving me?"

"No, no—I am not deceiving you," rejoined the goldbeater quickly. "Can you not understand that Bab and I feel ourselves to be environed by dangers? Yes—we know that we are standing upon a mine which may explode at any instant. Therefore we are prepared! We have breathed a solemn vow that the hangman's cord shall never touch our necks. On this we are resolved! Do you remember the phial of poison—"

"Ah! the prussic acid," said Mrs. Webber, eagerly, "which was found amongst Preston's effects?"

"The same!" rejoined Smedley. "There is the phial—it contains half the fluid which originally filled it. Bab has the other half."

"And will you give it to me?" demanded the woman, yearning for the deadly venom with as strong an avidity as if she were famished and it was food that she was imploring: "will you surrender up your share? can you for once in your life, Jack Smedley, do a generous action?"

The goldbeater pretended to hesitate for a few moments: but if his simulated hesitation had only lasted an instant longer, that fierce tiger-cat—his mother-in-law—would have flown at him to tear the phial from his grasp.

"Yes—take it!" he said, just in time to prevent such a scene: and he placed the phial in her hand.

"Oh, to cheat the gallows! to avoid the hangman! to escape the horrors of the gazing crowd!"—and the woman in an unnatural frenzy of joy pressed the phial to her lips.

"But my dear mother-in-law," whispered Jack Smedley, bending down

towards her ear, you will not take that poison for two or three days?—you will not compromise me?"

"No—I can afford to spare you now," answered Mrs. Webber: "for you have done me at least one service in my lifetime—a service that gives me the means of death! And now go—leave me! I am no puling foolish creature that can descend to slobbering farewells and sickly leave-takings—But stay one moment! You need not tell Bab that I hinted in my frenzy at the idea of betraying either you or her: for I should not have done it—it was mere madness at the time! And now go."

She waved her hand to her son-in-law, who opening the little trap at the door of the cell, called for the turnkey who was stationed at a grating at the end of the passage; and that functionary speedily arrived to afford Jack Smedley egress from the prisoner's chamber.

CHAPTER XCI.

THE SUBTERRANEAN.

It was evening, some five or six days after the interview of Jack Smedley with his mother-in-law; and his wife Barbara sate alone in the little parlour at their abode in London. She was reflecting upon what her husband had done at Liverpool, and bestowing an equal part of her attention on the glass of spirits-and-water which stood on the table. She had been rendered aware of Jack Smedley's successful mission to Mrs. Webber, inasmuch as he had written from Liverpool to his wife—but in a very guarded strain, for fear of the communication being intercepted. They had however agreed beforehand between themselves on some phrase that was to be introduced in case of success, while another phrase was to indicate failure. The former had found its introduction into the body of the epistle; and amidst a series of canting sentences and studied hypocrisies, the goldbeater thus found the means of setting his wife's mind at rest on the one grand important point.

Upon this she was cogitating—and dividing, as we have said, her attention between the subject of her thoughts and the liquor to which she had

become so wedded. It was nine o'clock; and the servant-girl who attended for a certain period during the day, entered to inquire whether anything more were wanted from her this evening. A response was given in the negative: the girl took her departure; and Mrs. Smedley was now alone in the house. She knew not how it was—she could not account for it—but assuredly did it seem as if a chill smote her the instant the front door closed behind that girl Bab Smedley was by no means the woman to yield to the influence of vague presentiments or ungrounded alarms; but she liked not this feeling which took possession of her—neither could she shake it off. She applied herself with additional vigour to the spirits-and-water: potations appeared to do her no good—on the contrary, they seemed to render her all the more nervous. Contemptuously as she had been wont to look upon her husband, she wished he was at home now for companionship's sake.

All of a sudden she fancied she heard a noise in the back part of the house: and for the first time in her life Bab Smedley was seized with such a terror that she could not rise from her chair to ascertain what the sound was. Then, as slowly recovering courage she looked around, she started on beholding the great black cat lying on a chair and gazing at her with its large green glassy eyes. She remembered the ominous instinct with which her husband's terrified imagination had endowed the animal on the night of Preston's murder; and she recoiled from the glare of those eyes.

The sound was renewed: this time she became aware that it was a knocking at the back door; and snatching up the candle, she proceeded from the room to answer the summons.

"It must be one of those Scotts—or else the Burker himself," she thought as she threaded the passage: "unless it is Jack come home and got himself into some scrape—for nobody else but one of these would come to the back door at this time of the evening."

She opened the door; and the light flashed upon the hang-dog countenance of Barney the Burker.

Bab Smedley exhibited no surprise: for as the reader has seen, she was more or less prepared for such a visit. She hastily closed the door, and led

the way into the parlour before a single word was spoken between them. The shutter was already fastened outside the window, over which the curtains inside were drawn; and thus there was no fear of the man's presence in that room being perceived from without. Filling Bab's tumbler completely up to the brim with the alcoholic liquor, the Burker drained the contents at a draught; and beyond slight brief winking of the eyes, no sign on his part indicated the strength or depth of the potation. He threw himself upon a seat,—saying, "So here I am at last, Bab, once more in London: though I can't say as how I'm werry sound in limb—or that I'm over sure of being safe in respect to that personal liberty which is the right of every free born individual."

"And where do you come from?" inquired Mrs. Smedley, who had leisure to observe the careworn haggard appearance of the Burker, as well as to judge that he was sinking with fatigue.

"Ah! where do I come from?—that's the question!" he responded with a certain degree of rough bitterness in his tone, "Wheresomever there's a quite ditch that a man may lay down in when he's got no bed—wheresomever there's a lonesome haystack that a houseless wanderer may snatch a snooze under—wheresomever there's fields and woods and all sorts of unfrequented places as far as possible from the towns and villages which a chap doesn't dare enter for fear of seeing a printed description of hisself with 'A Hundred Pound Reward' in big letters a-top, posted up agin the walls,—there's the places from which I come."

Having concluded this piece of eloquence after his own fashion, the Burker looked Mrs. Smedley very hard in the face for nearly a minute, as much as to say, "Well, what do you think of that?"—and then he brewed himself a tumbler of sprits-and-water, which he proceeded to drink at a more moderate rate than the previous one.

"Perhaps you would like something to eat?" suggested Mrs. Smedley.

"Well, now you mention it, I think I should like summut," answered the Burker; though only a minute back I fancied I was past eating: for I ain't broke my fast since eight o'clock this

morning—and then I should have got nuffin if I hadn't gived a boy a couple of taps on the head to make him surrender a wedge of bread and cheese he was a-breakfasting on as he went to his work."

Mrs. Smedley proceeded to the larder—whence she quickly returned with some cold beef, bread, and pickles; and the Barker, falling to, speedily made a meal that would have sufficed for half-a dozen ordinary appetites. Another tumbler was produced; and Mrs Smedley joined him in the drinking department.

"And where's Jack?" he inquired in the midst of his repast.

"Jack's at Liverpool," rejoined Mrs. Smedley: and she explained the object of his mission, not forgetting to add her knowledge of its success, so far as that the phial of poison was conveyed to her mother's hand.

"Well I'm blowed," said the Barker, "if Jack hasn't proved hisself to be a feller or more pluck than I'd have gived him credit for. But why is he staying at Liverpool?"

"He thought it best to make a show of lingering there a bit, so that he might see the chaplain and a justice-of-the-peace or two, and snivel and whimper and play the hypocrite——"

"Ah!" interrupted the Barker, with a look of approval and envy, "Jack can come it strong in that there line Well?"

"Because, don't you see," continued Bab, "if he had bolted off immediately after that interview with his mother-in-law, it might have been suspected that he gave her the poison: whereas by staying there for two or three days, and going and talking to the authorities—pretending that he was overwhelmed with grief that he didn't know what to think, whether she had really committed the crime, or whether she was the innocent victim of circumstantial evidence——"

"Ah, that's the ticket!" ejaculated the Barker, with his mouth full of beef and bread: "nothing lige coming the artful dodge—And who can do it better than my friend Jack Smedley?"

"And so, you see, Jack is stopping at Liverpool," continued Bab.

"What the deuce makes that there black cat of your'n stare so uncommon hard?" suddenly demanded the Barker.

The woman started: for the question which her companion had just put, all in a moment riveted the conviction that it had not ere now been mere fancy on her part. But unwilling to confess her fears to herself—still less to reveal them to the Barker—Bab Smedley instantaneously composed her countenance; and in a voice of assumed quiet, she said, "There's nothing wrong with the cat: she often looks like that."

"Then, if it was my cat, I'd pison it—that's what I'd do!" rejoined the Barker. "But how is things going on in London? I suppose you heerd tell of my escape——"

"I read it in the newspapers," answered the woman. "As for things in London we've allowed the Scotts a pound a week—that's one thing: and I rather fancy this house is watched by the detectives—that's another thing."

"The deuce!" growled the Barker. "But I say, Bab——"

Scarcely were the words spoken, when a knock was heard at the front door—a somewhat commanding kind of summons, and which made both Bab Smedley and the Barker spring up to their feet.

"There's something wrong," hastily whispered the former: "I know there is!"

"I'll get by the back," hastily responded the Barker. "But no!" he instantaneously ejaculated: "if there's a plant meant, there'll be people watching at the back. 'Come quick!' I'll go down the trap—and you can pretend you was asleep and didn't hear the knocking at the door. You must stall 'em off somehow or another, Bab."

"Yes, yes—it's the only chance!"

As the reader may suppose this colloquy took place in very hurried whispers, and occupied far less time than we have taken in describing it. Away from the parlour they glided—Bab shading the light which she carried in her hand: down into the scullery they went—the table was moved away—the bit of carpet also—the trap-door was raised—and into the subterranean went the Barker. Then almost in the twinkling of an eye Bab Smedley restored the little place to its former appearance: she put three or four saucepans and articles of crockery, and other kitchen implements upon the table, to give it an air as if it had not

been recently moved; and she sped upstairs. Meanwhile the knocking had been repeated in a louder and more imperious manner than before, yet all that we have described since the first summons echoed through the house, had not taken more than three minutes.

The feeling that all her presence of mind was now absolutely necessary—or at least apprehending some emergency which would require this display of her courage—Bab Smedley smoothed her countenance; and with a light in her hand, she proceeded to open the front door. A tall stout man at once entered the passage, followed by another individual, a glance at whom showed Mrs. Smedley that it was the applicant for the vacant lodging of a few days previous. She kept her countenance admirably: and said, "Good evening, gentlemen. I suppose you've come to see Mr. Smedley on business: but he's not at home."

"Not at home, eh?" exclaimed the tall stout man. "Are you sure?" and he looked the woman very hard in the face.

"Quite sure," she replied with the coolest effrontery—which indeed was all the more natural inasmuch as at the instant she was telling the truth. "He's at Liverpool, sir; and if you want anything in the goldbeating way——"

"Shut the door, Tom," interrupted the tall man, turning round abruptly to his companion. "Beg pardon, ma'am," he continued, coolly walking into the parlour, whither Mrs. Smedley followed with the light; "but this is no time for ceremony. 'We're officers—and we want your husband.'"

"Officers!"—and Mrs. Smedley affected to give a shriek of dismay, as if quite unprepared for the intelligence that thus burst upon her. "Want my husband——"

"Yes—and I'm thinking we're likely to find him too," promptly rejoined the officer, as he glanced at the table: "A late supper, evidently served up in a hurry—no tablecloth, nor nothing tidy—and two tumblers! Come, ma'am it's no use playing the fool with us: your husband is in the house—and we must search for him. There's a couple of my men at the back part of the premises; and Tom there is keeping the front door. So there's no chance of escape. You had better——"

"Good heavens! what has my poor husband done?" exclaimed Mrs. Smedley, as if overwhelmed with grief: "But it is impossible! Jack is as quiet as the child unborn—and a pious man too—such a pious man!"

"I'm sorry to say," interrupted the detective officer—for such he was—"that if you don't really know anything about it already—you've lost your mother."

"My mother!" ejaculated Mrs. Smedley, with a great show of wild astonishment and grief: "you don't surely mean that she has been tried—and—and already——"

"Executed?" said the officer, calmly finishing the sentence for Mrs. Smedley, "No—not exactly. She's cheated the hangman—in plain terms, ma'am she poisoned herself in the middle of last night—your husband took the very first train from Liverpool this mornin—he was telegraphed up—but somehow or another we just now missed him at the Euston Square Station—though we afterwards learnt that such person did arrive this evening by that particular train. However, we know he must be here."

"My poor mother!" sobbed Mrs. Smedley "But what could my husband——"

"Have to do with it?" ejaculated the officer. "Why, he gave her the poison as a matter of course! Who else could possibly have done it?"

"Oh, Sir, I can assure you Jack is incapable of such a thing! He went to Liverpool to see my poor mother—to teach her which was the right path if she had really gone into the wrong one——"

"Come, ma'am—this gammon won't do for us. Tom, let another of our people come in—and you follow me. Sorry to be rude, ma'am—very natural for you to try and screen your husband—but it won't do. Please to favour us with this light."

Bab Smedley had thrown herself upon a chair, in which she now sat rocking herself to and fro with every semblance of being utterly disconsolate, and likewise as if heedless of the words that were spoken to her.

The tall detective took up the candle and followed by his man Tom, he passed into the back room. No one was there. They ascended the staircase the upper chambers were speedily

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searched, but still without success. They descended: and Bab Smedley joined them in the passage,—saying. “Well, gentlemen, you see my husband is not in the house: but I almost wish he was, that he might convince you of the error under which you labour concerning him. A pious vessel like him—a deacon of the Shining Light’s Chapel—it is out of the question! But you have behaved so civil in doing your duty, that I hope you’ll just step into the parlour for a moment and take a small glass of something?”

“Stop a minute!” said the tall detective: “there’s a place down stairs. Come along, Tom.”

“Oh, well,” said Bab Smedley, still admirably preserving her presence of mind, and simulating an air of mournfulness in which there was no betrayal of anxious apprehension, “you can speedily satisfy yourself in that quarter—and then you shall accept the little refreshment I offer you.”

The two detectives descended the stairs,—Bab Smedley following, to procure, as she said, two or three more glasses. Her conduct appeared so natural—her part was performed with such consummate skill—that the detectives began really to think her husband could not be anywhere about the premises; at the same time that they were not the men to be stayed in the process of their investigation by anything which might possibly be an artifice to divert them from the scent.

The place which we have described as the scullery, was reached: the detectives passed at once into the front kitchen—but, as the reader may imagine, without discovering the object of their search. Cupboards were opened—nooks were pryed into—but all in vain. They repassed into the scullery: the huge door communicating with the cellar was opened—the interior was inspected—but no Jack Smedley was there. The two officers exchanged quick glances, as much as to imply that the woman had spoken truthfully after all, and that their trouble was vainly taken.

“Now, gentlemen,” said Bab—and it was a very anxious moment for the woman—but her inward feelings were not outwardly betrayed; “you will perhaps come up to the parlour and have a nice drop of something warm?”

“In a minute, ma’am,” answered the tall detective. “But what the deuce

does a bit of carpet mean in a place like this?”

He looked searchingly at the goldbeater’s wife as he spoke; and she steadily met that scrutinizing gaze. The next instant he kicked up the carpet with his foot: but the table stood so exactly over the outlines of the trapdoor that the carpet was not dislodged sufficiently to reveal them. The keen experienced eye of the detective led to the fancy that he perceived something like a studied artifice in the arrangement of the kitchen utensils and crockery on the little deal table; and lifting it up, he removed it away from the middle of the scullery. At the same instant he glanced furtively towards the woman: it struck him that for a single moment there was the glitter of uneasiness in her eyes: but if so, that betrayal of her feeling was so transient it could not be regarded as a positive certainty. However, the bit of carpet was now kicked completely away; and the outlines of the trap-door were revealed.

“Ah, here is something, Tom!” said the tall detective, stamping with his feet above the mouth of the pit, so that the hollow sound thus produced confirmed the suspicion of the existence of a trap-door.

The next instant it was raised; and at the same moment a sudden precipitate rush, as if of some wild animal, caused the detectives themselves to start—while a shriek of terror thrilled from the lips of the woman who uttered—“this abrupt occurrence had maintained such extraordinary presence of It was the black cat, which had sweeping down the stairs gushing noise of lightning and making the circuit of the scullery, the animal whisked up the staircase again as if it were wild.

“That’s an omen, I suppose?” said the tall detective, looking significantly at the goldbeater’s wife, who was pale with terror.

“It is enough to startle anybody,” she observed, once more by a mighty effort recovering her self-possession, “It’s the presence of your strangers that frightens the poor creature. As for the trap-door here, it only covers well——”

“With steps to it,” said the detective, with an ironical smile.

"Yes—with steps down to a certain distance: they are all broket at the bottom—and if you don't mind——"

"You think we shall be drowned? It's a very curious earthy smell for water to send up: and what's more," added the detective, holding the candle over the opening, "I can't catch the reflection of any water at all."

Bab felt convinced it was all up with the *Burker*: and she inwardly trembled on account of herself; for her arrest must necessarily follow, if only for the reason that she was harbouring a criminal on whose head a reward was set. She thought of escape: but how could she effect it? There was a man in the passage up-stairs; and she had been told that the back part of the premises was watched by other officers.

"Now, Tom, hold the light," said the tall detective; "and keep an eye——"

He did not finish the sentence—but nodded significantly, and his sedate, quiet-looking, but not the less resolute subordinate comprehended that the allusion bore reference to Mrs. Smedley. Drawing forth a pair of pistols, the detective began to descend the stone steps of the subterranean—while his man held the candle conveniently at the mouth: and the former said in a stern decisive tone, "Now, Mr. Smedley, we know you are here! You had better surrender yourself; for if you attempt any resistance, you will perhaps get a bullet through the head."

This intimation was followed by the click of one pistol—then by that of the other: yet no answer was returned.

"What will the *Burker* do?" thought Bab to herself: and quick as lightning she revolved in her mind how she could possibly second any endeavour that he might perchance make for the frustration of the officers' designs.

At that self-same instant there was another wild rush of the frenzied black cat. This time it was in the passage on the ground floor; but the sounds reached the ears of those in the scullery. The door at the head of the staircase, having doubtless been disturbed by the animal, close with violence; and the tall detective demanded, "What the deuce is that, Tom?"

"Only that cursed animal again," was the response: for all was now suddenly still once more.

Mrs. Smedley, having her nerves by this time completely strung for any abrupt or startling occurrence, quickly regained her own self-possession: and pushing the door at the bottom of the staircase, she said, "At all events we won't have the brute come rushing down here again."

The door closed and latched itself by the impulse thus given to it; and the officer who answered to the abbreviated Christian name of Tom, exclaimed sternly, "You keep quiet, ma'am! Stand away from that door—and none of your nonsense!"

"She can't escape, Tom," observed his superior: "the passage up-stairs is guarded."

All that followed was now the work of a few instants. Scarcely had the tall detective given utterance to those last words which we have recorded, when there was a rush beneath—a blow was dealt—and he disappeared as if engulfed in the dark depth from the view of his companion who was holding the light. Quick as thought, Bab Smedley threw herself with the fury of a tiger-cat upon the subordinate Tom, and precipitated him headlong down the steps. The sounds of several severely dealt blows coming up from the abyss, reached her ears; but she could see nothing—the light had fallen into the pit—she was enveloped in total darkness. Not for an instant did she lose her presence of mind: she knew where on a shelf there were the means of obtaining another light: a lucifer was struck—and at the very moment that she applied it to another candle, Barney the *Burker* emerged from below.

"Are they done for?" was Mrs. Smedley's rapidly put question.

"Let's see," said the *Burker*: and snatching the candle from her hand, he partially descended the steps—whence almost instantaneously returning, he added, "They're stunned, if not killed. And now what's to be done next!"

Bab, in a hasty whisper, gave the wretch to understand that there was an officer in the passage, and that there were others outside, watching the back premises.

"Take the liget—go up quick," said the *Burker*,—"tell the officer he's

wanted below—whimper a bit—and say as how your poor husband is took.”

The woman instantaneously proceeded to obey Barney's directions; and with the light in her hand, she ascended the stairs. We should observe that from the circumstance of the doors at top and bottom being closed, the officer in the passage had heard little or nothing of what was going on below: or if indeed that suddenly executed movement on the part of Mrs. Smedley, by which Tom was thrown into the pit, had met his ears, it might naturally have been taken for the quick transient scuffle of an arrest being effected. Leaving the doors open—for she comprehended full well what the Barker's intention was—the infamous woman assumed a look of deep distress; and accosting the officer who had been appointed to keep guard upon the front door, she said in a whimpering tone, and breaking her words with an apparently convulsing sob, “It's all over! They have taken my poor dear man—and they want you down below. This is the way; there's a light where they are. Oh, dear!—oh, dear!”

The woman's part was so well played—and the whole proceeding seemed so natural—that the officer hesitated not for an instant to descend the steps to which she led him,—she herself remaining on the top to light him as he went down. The instant he reached the bottom he was felled by a blow from the Barker's club: Bab Smedley rushed down the stairs—and her ruffian accomplice, at once perceiving that the unfortunate official was stunned, dragged him into the cellar, the huge door of which he closed and bolted. Another quick examination of the subterranean showed the miscreant that the two detectives still lay motionless at the bottom of the steps; and thus far a complete triumph was gained.

But how to escape? Mrs. Smedley and the Barker had all their wits about them. They quickly ascended to the parlour, where they each partook of a hasty glass of spirits; and the Barker said, “Now put on your things without an instant's delay.”

Bab rushed up to her bed-chamber: her bonnet and shawl were slipped on: her money, the few trinkets she possessed, and a packet of papers were

quickly secured about her person—so that in a couple of minutes she joined the Barker again.

“Now we must make a rush for it!” he said. “You go out first, and turn to the left: I'll follow quick and go to the right. We must get out of London as quick as we can, and trust to chances whether as how we ever meet again. But first of all, have you got any blunt?”

Bab Smedley thrust three or four sovereigns into the Barker's hand; and then issued forth from the front door of the house. Barney kept it about an inch ajar to listen, with his club in readiness to receive any other police officials who might possibly rush in. But all was quiet; and after allowing about a minute's pause, he quitted the habitation,—closing the door behind him. Without the slightest molestation he continued his way along the street—and felt himself to be in comparative safety.

There were in reality no more officials in the front part of the Smedley's house: but a couple were watching in the yard at the back,—little dreaming of the utter discomfiture of their comrades within. The whole affair on the part of the detectives had been entered upon so quietly, that the neighbours in the street continued utterly unsuspecting of what was going on; and thus no hue and cry was raised when the Barker stole forth. The officers, as the reader has seen, had come hither merely for the arrest of Jack Smedley: but if they could have foreseen that instead of the goldbeater they would have found the Barker, they would have adopted far different precautions and would have invaded the house in a posse.

It might have been ten minutes after the Barker's escape, that the tall detective began to recover his senses: for he was only stunned—not killed—by the onslaught he had experienced. He was however much injured: for the miscreant had beaten him about the head and shoulders with his club. On thus coming to himself, the detective heard the subdued moans of his subordinate Tom; and it was yet several minutes before the two men were sufficiently recovered to drag themselves up from the pit. Then they heard a feeble knocking at the cellar door: they opened it—and found their

comrade who had been made a prisoner there, and who was nearly as much injured as themselves. The watchers from the back yard were admitted into the house; but it was only too evident that the Barker and Bab Smedley had escaped.

On the following day the subterranean was thoroughly investigated by the police: the earth at the bottom was dug up—and slight though sufficient traces were discovered to prove that the evidences of foul crimes had been concealed and well nigh obliterated there. The quicklime, mixed with the soil, afforded a frightful indication of how the dark work had been done; and though no human remains were disinterred, there existed no doubt that more than one victim of murder had been consigned to that subterranean tomb.

CHAPTER XCII.

ATALANTA.

TURN we now to the lodgings of the Hon. Augustus Softly—the young officer to whom Madame Angelique, on breaking up her establishment, so generously bequeathed Mademoiselle Armantine.

Very beautiful was the French girl—yet far from being so little frail as the milliner had chosen to represent her. Of a fascinating style of loveliness—with all the first freshness of youth sufficiently well preserved—and indeed still youthful, for she was not yet twenty-two—Armantine was fully calculated to make a powerful impression on such a mind as that of Mr. Softly. Her manners were captivating: she had all those little bewitching arts which specially characterize the females of the nation to which she belonged: she was far from deficient in accomplishments—she could draw, play, and sing; and as for dancing, she was a veritable proficient in the art. Thus altogether the Hon. Augustus Softly found her a very enchanting mistress.

Several days had elapsed since the commencement of his acquaintance with Armantine: and one afternoon, at about two o'clock, she arrived at his lodgings, according to an appointment made on the previous day. He purposed to

regale her with a champagne luncheon and he had risen at least an hour earlier than usual for the purpose. The apartment where he received her was decorated in true bachelor-fashion with foils and boxing-gloves, hunting whips and firearms, fishing tackle and other accessories to field sports, were scattered about—though Mr. Softly had never angled but once in his life, on which occasion after a whole day's fishing caught a minnow—he was an execrable shot—and as for hunting he had not sufficient courage to follow the hound. But he was nevertheless fond of boasting of his accomplishments and his feats in all these respects; and he considered it manly to have the articles above enumerated scattered about his apartments.

Mademoiselle Armantine, having flung off her bonnet and shawl, sat down at table; and the champagne soon led to very lively discourse.

"My dear girl," said Softly, after some conversation on general topics "I ought to consider myself exceedingly fortunate that you should prefer me to the Duke of Marchmont."

"Ah! my dear Augustus," replied the young lady, fixing her eyes tenderly upon him; "to see you at parade was perfectly irresistible. But Madame Angelique told you all about it?"

"Yes: and I certainly felt myself highly flattered. But don't be offended, my dear Armantine," continued Mr. Softly: "I only just want to ask one little question—and that is, did you really never have a lover—you know what I mean—before the Duke?"

"Oh, never! never!" exclaimed the French girl, with so much readiness that Mr. Softly was at once convinced of her sincerity.

"And your father——"

"Ah, don't speak of him!" suddenly interrupted Armantine, with a real though transient feeling of remorse.

"Do tell me," said the young gentleman, "something about your earlier life. Drink another glass of champagne—let us laugh and be as gay as possible."

"Well, we will," said Armantine. "Now listen while I tell you a little tale——"

"Is it a true one?" asked Softly.

"You shall judge for yourself. About five years ago," continued Armantine, "a young French lady, endowed with

olerable accomplishments, and about
s good looking as I am——”

“In that case she was an angel,”
ried the lieutenant of the guards.

“She was an angel, then—since you
ill have it so,” resumed Armantine,
ughing so as to display her pearly
eth. “Well, this angel was consigned
a convent——”

“I recollect that Madame Angelique
——”

“Now, do be silent!—pray don’t
interrupt me!”—and Armantine tapped
is cheek with her small snowy
white hand. “The young lady I speak
of was consigned to a convent—which
she relished about as much as you
would fancy bread and water for your
lianner. Well, she had not been many
weeks there when she escaped; and
not daring to return home, sped to
Paris. She knew not exactly how to
get her living; and finding it
inconvenient to starve—as well as
being little disposed to plunge headlong
into improper courses—You see, my
dear Augustus, it is a very moral
tale——”

“But don’t let it get *too* serious,”
interjected Softly.

“Oh, no!” exclaimed Armantine,
with another smile: “it is about to
take a very lively turn. Being an
accomplished dancer, the young lady
went boldly to the Opera——not very
boldly though—I mean that the act
was bold to go there at all: for she was
all modesty and confusion. However,
she inquired for the ballet-master, and
besought employment. He desired
her to afford him a specimen of her
abilities, and I suppose that as in
consequence of her timidity she
acquitted herself with some degree of
awkwardness, he chucked her under
the chin—no doubt for the purpose of
encouraging her. She boxed his ears
in return. For a moment he appeared
as if about to be desperately angry:
but altering his mind he burst out into
a hearty laugh—for he was a very
good-natured man. This little incident
gave the young lady spirits; and then
he acquitted herself so well that he
resolved to prepare her for the ballet.
Then she went through a course of
training: her progress was incredible
—her proficiency was soon complete.
The ballet-master treated her with
kindness—protected her from insult—
and appeared to have conceived a

paternal affection for the young lady
after the repulse which his first amatory
overture had received. At length the
day came when she was to make her
appearance in public: and every wall in
Paris was covered with immense posters
announcing the intended *debut* of
Mademoiselle Atalanta—for that was
the name which the exquisite imagi-
nation of the ballet-master bestowed
upon her.”

“And a very pretty name too!”
observed Softly: “but of course not
so captivating as Armantine. Pray
proceed,”

“Atalanta’s triumph was immense,”
continued the French girl; “and the
reviews on the following day spoke of
her as a perfect miracle in the Ter-
pischorean sphere. It may perhaps be as
well to observe that out of the dozen
principal *critiques* the ballet-master
himself wrote seven, all in different
strains of eulogy; and the remaining
five were penned by the reviewers im-
mediately after the champagne-supper
which the Director of the Opera gave
to the gentlemen of the press in the
Green-room. But all this apart, Ata-
lanta’s triumph was really immense.
She appeared as a sylph amongst a mass
of clouds: she had wings at her back—
flowers in her hair; and whatsoever
beauties of form she possessed were
developed by the gauzy drapery. The
enthusiasm her appearance excited, no
doubt inspired her to put forth all her
powers; and subsequent *critiques*—
which were *not* penned by the friendly
ballet-master, and *not* written under the
influence of the Director’s champagne—
pronounced her style of dancing to be a
perfect combination of all the elegancies
and graces pertaining to the art.”

“The ravishing creature!” ejaculated
Softly. “But I fancy I see in this
lovely embodiment of graces and ele-
gancies——”

“Pray anticipate nothing!” inter-
jected Armantine, again tapping her
foolish young lover’s cheek in a play-
ful manner. “You may easily suppose
that she had a great many overtures—
and was exposed to many temptations
—some of which, when rejected,
changed into persecution. And now I
come to that part which constitutes
my motive for telling you this tale.
Amongst the noblemen and gentlemen
—foreign as well as French—wh
obtained admittance behind the scenes

and were allowed the *entree* of the Greenroom, was a fierce military looking Englishman, some, forty years of age, who made the most brilliant overtures to Mademoiselle Atalanta: but, along with the rest, he experienced a decisive refusal. He became the most persevering of her persecutors. He had her carried off to a lonely house on the outskirts of Paris: but thence she escaped. A second time was she carried off; and on this occasion to a house of infamy, where the unprincipled Englishman vowed that if she did not submit by fair means, violence should be used, and all Paris should know next day that Atalanta, the supposed paragon of virtue, had passed the night there. She however escaped a second time, the police were informed of the outrage—and the Englishman was ordered to leave Paris. His infatuation took a phase by no means uncommon: it turned from love to hate—and he secretly set himself to work to find out who Mademoiselle Atalanta really was. He succeeded: he communicated with her family; and for the third time was she carried off when leaving the opera—but on this occasion by her father and brother. She was taken back to her convent. This was what the Englishman desired; and he found means of causing a letter to be conveyed to her, intimating that if she would consent to fly with him, he would effect her escape. She showed the letter to the Superior: it was conveyed to the police—and the Englishman was turned out of France. Circumstances recently brought Atalanta to London. This very day she has encountered the Englishman; and he has threatened her with his implacable vengeance unless she chooses to place herself under his protection.

"And the charming Atalanta," exclaimed Softly, "is, as I all along suspected, the equally charming Armantine?"

"Put all the *charmings* out of the question," responded the young lady, with a smile, "and you are right. Now my dear Augustus, you are acquainted with one episode in my life."

"Yes—and Madame Angelique told me that your father is a Marquis," he immediately added.

"Ah! pray do not speak of him," murmured Armantine. "If I were married, it would indeed be very, very different!"

"And Madame Angelique," pure Softly, "helped the Duke of Mont to carry you off from the convent two or three months back."

"If you see Marchmont," was wily French girl's guarded response, "he will tell you all about it."

"I saw him just now," rejoined Softly.

"Ah, indeed!" ejaculated Armant quickly.

"Yes—he called upon me for a few minutes," rejoined the Hon. August Softly, "about half-an-hour before you came in. To tell you the truth—being rather proud of my conquest, I spoke it to the Duke; and he said enough to confirm Madame Angelique's tale. About this Englishman of yours—what is his name?"

"His name?—Captain Cartwright," responded Armantine: and then she added with the visible shudder, "Ah! Oh! he is so terribly ferocious—such a desperate man! I am sure I should faint if he made his appearance to molest me!"

"Molest you, my dear girl?" exclaimed Mr. Softly, assuming a very valorous look: "not while I am here to defend you! No matter whether swords or pistols—egad! I would teach him a lesson which he should not forget."

Armantine watched her lover narrowly, but without seeming to do so, as he thus spoke; and she was shrewd and penetrating enough to discover that beneath his parade of magnanimity there was a real cowardice. In truth the Hon. Augustus Softly was as chicken-hearted a young gentleman as ever by such paltriness of disposition disgraced the British uniform. Let the reader recollect that we are by no means drawing him as a type of British officers generally—nor of those of the Guards especially. In this foppery, his conceit, his extravagance, and his dissipated habits, he might certainly be taken as the representative of a large class of military men bearing commissions: but in the cowardice of his nature he constituted an exception.

"Come," said Armantine, suddenly assuming a most lively air, "we will not talk any more about this odious captain. The champagne ought to put us good spirits. Come, sing me a song!"

"I never sang in my life, my dear girl," replied Softly. "The Guards, you know, don't sing."

"Well, but we must do something to amuse ourselves," exclaimed Armantine, now exhibiting all the gaiety and sprightliness that characterize the women of the country to which she belonged. "Ah! there is your uniform! I have a very great mind to try it on and see how it fits me."

"Do!" exclaimed Softly. "Capital idea!—delicious, 'pon my honour!"

Armantine sprang from her seat, laughing merrily; and first of all she put on the Hon. Augustus Softly's cap with the gold band round it. She looked at herself in the glass; and as the cap rested above the long flowing glossy hair, and the countenance wore an expression of mischievous archness, Mademoiselle Armantine looked quite charming. Softly was enraptured: he considered the whole proceeding exquisite: and any one might indeed have envied him the facility with which he was amused.

"Now for the coat!" exclaimed Armantine: and she was about to put it on.

"What! over your dress?" said Augustus

"You wicked fellow, what would you have me do?" and she tapped him playfully on the cheek. "Surely, it will fit me as it is? You are not so very stout—neither am I."

Thus speaking, and laughing merrily all the while, Armantine put on the red coat: but she could not fasten it across her bosom. Mr. Softly volunteered his aid: and as he availed himself of the opportunity to snatch divers little licences with his beautiful mistress, the playful tapping of the cheek was renewed accompanied by peals of laughter more hilarious than ever. But all of a sudden Armantine's countenance underwent a striking change; a faint shriek burst from her lips; and the Hon. Augustus Softly turning hastily round in the direction to which her eyes were looking he started on beholding the cause of her affright.

A very fierce looking gentleman was standing upon the threshold, holding the door half-open, and surveying the scene. He was tall, and somewhat stoutly built,—his form being indicative of great strength; while the expression

of his countenance denoted a veritable fire-eater. He was of the middle age—perhaps a trifle past it; and had gray whiskers and moustaches,—the latter considerably enhancing the fierceness of his look. His brows, naturally thick and overhanging, were now much corrugated, as if with the infuriate feelings which were pent up in his soul, but seeking to have a vent, and determined to find one too. He wore a sort of semi-military apparel, of a somewhat antiquated and well-nigh exploded fashion. A surtout coat, all frogged and braided over the breast, and fastening with hooks and eyes, fitted tight to his strongly built person, and was closed up to the throat. He had gray trousers, with red stripes; and on his head was a species of foraging-cap. He wore buckskin gloves; and had altogether the air of a military man of the old school.

Mr. Softly's fears at once suggested that Armantine's terror could have been created by nothing but the appearance of Captain Cartwright—and that therefore the formidable Captain Cartwright this fierce-looking individual must assuredly be.

"Save me from him, my dear Augustus!" said Armantine, flinging her arms about the neck of her lover, and clinging to him as if in the very frenzy of terror.

"Oh—yes—yes! I'll—I'll save you, my dear," stammered the young Guardsman, with a very pale countenance. "But perhaps the gentleman—the Captain, I mean—for I suppose it is Captain Cartwright to whom I have the honour of speaking—will be so good as to explain——"

"Explain, sir?" ejaculated the fierce-looking individual, now seeming ten thousand times more fierce than at first: "I never explain!—unless it is with such things as these:" and he pointed towards a sword and a pistol-case which lay upon a side table.

"Perhaps, sir," said Mr. Softly, plucking up all the courage he could possibly call to his aid in order to meet the present crisis, "if you were to do me the honour to—to sit down—and—and take a glass of wine——"

"My demeanour here, sir," interrupted the Captain, closing the door violently behind him, "depends entirely on the answers I receive to a few questions I am going to put. In

that young lady, sir, I entertain a very deep interest——."

"Don't for heaven's sake, irritate him, my dearest Augustus!" whispered Armantine, as with countenance averted from Captain Cartwright she tremblingly clung to her lover's arm.

"A very deep interest," continued the fierce-looking intruder; "and moreover I have her father's authority for taking any step that may seem good to me according to circumstances."

"Ah, my poor father!" murmured Armantine. "But pray, my dear Augustus, do not—do not anger this dreadful man—or he will kill us both outright!"

"I may at one time have entertained a tender sentiment for that young lady," continued Captain Cartwright; "but circumstances have occurred to alter that feeling—and now it is a fraternal or paternal regard that I experience for her. I have traced her hither. If you tell me, Mr. Softly, that she is your wife, I shall be satisfied—I shall rejoice—I shall fill a bumper of champagne—and what is more, I shall drink it!"

Here, as if to render his words all the more impressive, Captain Cartwright struck the table such a violent blow with his clenched fist that Mr. Softly shuddered to the innermost confines of his being; while his mistress whispered in a hastier and more tremulous tone than ever, "He is mad! he is desperate! For heaven's sake say anything—everything to pacify him! I know all your courage, my dear Augustus: but think what a dreadful thing it would be for me if he stretched you weltering in your blood at my feet."

At this horrible idea poor Softly gave vent to a low moan; and he trembled so perceptibly that the reader may marvel how it was that Armantine could whisperingly add, "For both our sakes restrain this dreadful ardour of your's!—curb your fiery temper!—tell him everything—promise him everything—or he will massacre us!"

Meanwhile Captain Cartwright, having dealt that terribly energetic hump upon the table, took three or four strides to and fro in the apartment as if to compose his excited feeling: but this were his object, the aim was not reached—for it was with the fiercest possible expression of countenance that

he once more accosted the miserable Augustus Softly.

"Yes, sir," continued the fire-eater, "if that young lady is your wife, I shall be happy—I shall rejoice: I shall be enabled to speed to her father with the agreeable intelligence. But if, sir, on the other hand"—and here Captain Cartwright ground his teeth as if with an uncontrollable fury at the bare idea he was about to explain—"if, sir, you cannot look me frankly in the face and say that she is here without discredit or dishonour to herself, I shall be compelled, sir—painful though the alternative be—to embrace my hands in the blood of a fellow-creature?"

Having given vent to this frightful threat, Captain Cartwright did not dash his clenched fist upon the table—but he stalked straight up to where the young officer's sword lay, and he deliberately drew the weapon from its sheath.

"Just heaven, he will murder us!" whispered Armantine, as if in a dying voice. "For my sake—for both our sakes—tell him I am your wife!"

"But, my dear girl——"

"Did you speak, sir?" demanded the officer, turning round upon Softly with such fierce abruptness that the unfortunate young gentleman felt his blood all curdling in his veins, his teeth chattering, and his limbs trembling. "Did you give me an answer to my question? Yes or no—is that lady your wife?"

"Ye-e-e-s," replied Augustus, in such a terrible state of bewilderment that he scarcely knew what he was saying.

"Yes?" exclaimed Cartwright. "Speak it out more plainly!"

"For heaven's sake," whispered Armantine, "dearest Augustus——"

"Yes, she is my wife!" said the young officer, feeling as if by the assertion his life was suddenly saved.

"Then look up, Armantine—and be not abashed!" exclaimed Cartwright. "Never mind this masquerading nonsense—dressing yourself up in your husband's regimentals! New-married people are as silly as lovers after all! Mr. Softly, you are a man of honour—I am proud, sir, to make our acquaintance. There is my hand."

While thus speaking, the terrible captain had returned the sword to its sheath; and hastily drawing off his buckskin glove, he presented his hand

to Softly. The young gentleman took it; and now Mademoiselle Armantine ventured to look round upon the fierce Captain.

"Do not be afraid of me any longer," he said, assuming a milder tone and look. "Here's my hand for *you* also—and now I can communicate joyous tidings to your father. But, Ah! I forgot something! The marriage certificate? I must see it—I must satisfy myself before I compromise my word in communicating with your father."

"Tell him you have left it elsewhere," hastily whispered Armantine. "Tell him anything—for heaven's sake do! His look is already changing."

"The marriage certificate, sir?" said Captain Cartwright sternly.

"The certificate? Oh ye-e-e-s," stammered the Hon. Augustus Softly, "It's all right—it's—it's at a friend's of mine—where we had the wedding-breakfast—ye-e-e-s, that's it."

"Good!" exclaimed Captain Cartwright: "you are a man of honour in every respect—and it rejoices me that I can be proud of your friendship instead of having to wreak a frightful vengeance upon you. Here's to both your healths!"

"Thus speaking, the now appeased fire-eater filled himself a glass of champagne, and poured the contents down that throat from which such terrible nanaces had recently come forth.

"Mr. Softly," he continued, "I must see that certificate. I can say nothing to Armantine's father until I have received indisputable evidence that she is your wife. To-morrow I am engaged to fight a duel in the morning—to rounce a rascal in the afternoon—and to break a fellow's head at my Club in the evening. But the day after, sir, at two o'clock punctually, I shall be here. I don't like using threats, sir,"—and here the Captain looked most overpoweringly fierce: "but if the certificate is not forthcoming, I shall be compelled, sir—disagreeably compelled—to inflict such a chastisement on you—"

"Oh, Captain Cartwright!" exclaimed Armantine, as if in an agony of terror: "spare these dreadful threats!—the certificate will be forthcoming! Will it not, dear Augustus?"—and she looked appealingly at her paramour.

"Ye-e-e-s—Oh! yes," responded the miserable Softly, who again felt that

all the blood was curdling in his veins and that his hair was standing on end.

"Good!" exclaimed the Captain. "The day after to-morrow at two o'clock I shall be here!"

He then stalked out of the room, closing the door violently behind him; and the miserable Mr Augustus Softly sank with a hollow groan into an armchair. He looked the very picture of wretchedness; but Armantine filled him a glass of wine—seated herself on his knee—wound her arm about his neck—and plied all her most witching cajoleries—lavished too all the most tender caresses, with such effect that the young gentleman rallied sufficiently to envisage his position and discuss it within himself.

What was to be done? To appeal to a magistrate for protection against the fire-eater, would be virtually to avow a dastard inability to protect himself. To run away from London at a moment when he knew he could not procure leave of absence from his regiment, would be to renounce his commission—and when the reason should be known, to be cut by everybody as a coward. Yet the certificate *must* be forthcoming! Would the date of it matter so long as it was displayed? Certainly not. Then the only alternative which could be adopted, was the marriage of the Hon. Augustus Softly with Mademoiselle Armantine by special licence on the morrow.

All these reflections passed through Mr. Softly's brain, as Armantine doffed the red coat and the cap. He looked at her. She was exquisitely shaped—her countenance was beautiful. But then, to marry one's mistress! Still it was better than to be sacrificed to the vengeance of a bloodthirsty fire-eater; and Mr. Softly came to the conclusion that it was the best course he could possibly adopt. Armantine fully comprehended all that was passing in his mind: she lavished her caresses upon him—she declared how much she loved him—she said everything to gratify his vanity and minister to his pride—she protested that she was ready and willing to make any sacrifice to ensure his happiness—she would even flee from the country, though her own heart should break—but she dreaded the vengeance of the terrible Cartwright on account of her dear Augustus!

Could Mr. Softly resist all this? Impossible! He drank glass after glass of champagne—his blood was heated with the wine and with Armantine's seductive caresses—he likewise experienced an awful horror of Captain Cartwright; and thus, amidst the strange and unnatural confusion of his feelings and bewilderment of his thoughts, he decided on securing the charmer as his wife, and thereby averting the hideous vengeance of the fire-eater.

CHAPTER XCIII.

THE OLD LORD AND HIS MISTRESS.

THE scene now changes to the sumptuously furnished house which Lord Wenham had hired for the accommodation of his beautiful Eglantine—who was passed off on him as the immaculate niece of the not very immaculate Madame Angelique. The reader will not have forgotten that his lordship was an octogenarian, with bowed form wrinkled face, an absence of teeth, a continuous hacking cough, and a mumbling stammering mode of speech. Well nigh in his dotage, he had placed implicit confidence in the specious tale of Eglantine's virtue, and in the specious manner in which the young lady had played her part towards her "wicked aunt." Immensely rich, and a widower, the antiquated nobleman thought that he had a perfect right to minister to his own pleasures; and he had not therefore hesitated to form this most expensive connexion.

It was in the forenoon on the day following the incidents which we have related in the preceding chapter; and if we peep into an exquisitely furnished boudoir at Miss Eglantine's new abode, we shall find the young lady and her ancient protector seated at breakfast. His lordship had passed the night at the house; and he was completely infatuated, like an old dotard as he was, with his beautiful mistress. We should observe that there had been all the shyness and prudery of a veritable virgin bride in the first instance; and now that some days had elapsed since the connection began, Eglantine appeared to entertain so lively a sense

of the old lord's generosity and kindness, that she behaved as if she already esteemed and could soon love him.

They were seated, as we have said at breakfast,—Eglantine in a charming *deshabille*—Lord Wenham in a dressing gown and black velvet skull-cap. The contrast was immense—and afforded a striking illustration of the varieties of appearance which human beings may present to the view,—how one may be formed to fascinate and another disgust—how grace, elegance, and loveliness may belong to youth, and how loathsome ugliness may characterize old age. And yet that old lord was infatuated enough to hug the belief that he had already rendered himself agreeable to Eglantine—that she esteemed him—and that she would soon love him. And he moreover already doted upon her: he would sooner have parted with title and wealth than have separated from her. He was jealous too—as jealous as he could be—not because she had given him any reason for the sentiment, nor because he was deficient in conceit of his own merits—but because it is in the nature of all men to be thus jealous of young wives, and still more of young mistresses.

"My dear girl," he presently said, after having contemplated her for two or three minutes,—ugh! ugh! this dreadful cough of mine!—you seem pensive to-day? Tell me, my sweet girl—ugh! ugh! if it weren't for this horrible cough I should feel quite young again!—But tell me, what it is that makes you look so pensive?"

"Pensive—am I pensive?" ejaculated Eglantine, as if suddenly starting up from a reverie: "I am sure I did not think I was! And yet—"

"Ugh! ugh!—and yet—ugh! ugh!—this dreadful cough! But why, my dear, did you qualify your assurance? Pray be candid with me—ugh! ugh! If there is anything you want—ugh! ugh!—anything more I can do to ensure your happiness—"

"Your lordship has already done so much for me," responded Eglantine, "as to leave not a single wish unfulfilled. Indeed, I had never formed any such wishes at all—for I did not foresee what my fate was to be!"—and as Eglantine thus spoke in a tremulous voice, she suffered her eyelids to droop—her air became pensive again—and then she

hastily passed her kerchief across her brow, as if wiping away tears.

"Come, come, my dear girl," said the old nobleman, "what—what—ugh! ugh!—perdition take this cough of mine!—ugh! ugh!—what, what is that makes so melancholy?"

"To be candid with you, my lord," answered Eglantine, suddenly looking up with an air of the most artless sincerity into the countenance of her aged protector, "I have been thinking what my uncle would say to me if he knew what I had done—or what he would do to my aunt if he learnt to what she has brought me?"

"Your uncle—ugh! Your aunt—ugh! ugh!" stammered and coughed Lord Wenham. "I never knew that there was a *Monsieur* Angelique—I always thought that Madame was either a widow or at least passed as such. Tell me, my dear—ugh! ugh! ugh!—this cough will be the death of me—ugh! ugh!"

"Madame Angelique is a widow," explained Eglantine, "but nevertheless I have an uncle. I will tell you how it is. Madame Angelique's sister married an English gentleman: I am the issue of that union. My parents are dead, as your lordship has already been told; and I was taken at their death into the care of a distant relative. She also died; and then my aunt Angelique took care of me. My late father's brother has for a long time been abroad—first in the army—then holding a high situation in the civil service of India; and he is shortly to return home—even if he be not at this moment in England. That is the uncle, my dear lord," added Eglantine, with a profound sigh, "whom I dread so much."

"Is he a very stern man—ugh! ugh!—is he so very formidable?" asked Lord Wenham: and then he was seized with such a violent fit of coughing that it was a wonder he was not shaken into the next world.

"I have not seen him since I was about ten or eleven years old," replied Eglantine, when the fit of coughing was over; "and then my uncle came on a year's leave to England for the benefit of his health. Oh! I never can forget that countenance of his—so stern—so threatening—so fierce! Do not, my dear lord, judge all the other members of my family by my

aunt Angelique—not by what I myself have become."

"Nonsense, nonsense, my dear!" ejaculated Wenham: "don't talk in this way of yourself. You seem to think—ugh! ugh!—that you have done something most dreadfully bad by living with me. Nothing of the sort—ugh! ugh! ugh! this cough—ugh! ugh!—of mine! It is not as if you had been a wild giddy girl, with a number of lovers—or as if you had been one of the regular inmates of Madame Angelique's establishment. But innocent—ugh! ugh!—and virtuous—ugh! ugh!—as you were—"

"Ah! still, my lord," said Eglantine, with another profound sigh, "I have fallen—I feel it—and how can I look my uncle in the face should he find me out on his return to England?"

"But why need he find you out?" inquired the old nobleman: "why—ugh! ugh!—should he discover—ugh! ugh!—where you are?"

"How can it possibly be avoided?" asked Eglantine. "He will come to London—he is unmarried—childless and I believe well off. He will ask for his young relative—he will not submit to the evasions and equivocations which my aunt Angelique is sure to use. He is terribly violent—resolutely determined—fierce almost to savageness. He is persevering too; and if he do not extort from Madame Angelique a confession of all that has occurred, he will leave no stone unturned in order to find me out."

"Ugh! ugh!—my dear—then must hide you," said the old nobleman and as his voice abruptly rose and as his voice abruptly rose wonted mumbling and stammering into a positive shriek, he yelled forth, "I couldn't part from you!—they shan't tear you from me! they shan't tear you from me!"

"Oh, how kind and good your lordship is!" murmured Eglantine, apparently melted to tears: and starting from her seat, she threw her arms round the old dotard's neck, lavishing caresses upon him.

"You do love me a *little* bit?" said Wenham, looking up into her face with gloating eyes, and grinning like an ancient goat.

"Ah! until now I esteemed you," responded Eglantine: "but at present I feel—yes, I feel that I love you!"—then gliding back to her seat, she flung

upon her old protector a look that seemed to vibrate with mingled tenderness and gratitude.

"You are a good girl—ugh! ugh!—a very good girl," said the nobleman; and we will go out presently in the carriage to the splendid shawl-shop in Regent-street—where—ugh! ugh!—you shall choose whatever you like."

"Ah, my dear lord," exclaimed Eglantine, "now you will understand the impossibility of keeping myself concealed from this terrible uncle of mine, whenever he begins to search for me. How can I remain in-doors all day? how can I debar myself the pleasure of accompanying you in your drives? I care not for society or gaiety: with you I can be happy:—but complete loneliness and seclusion I can not endure! My uncle must sooner or later find me out—"

At this moment the door opened; and a shriek pealed from Eglantine's lips. Lord Wenham at first looked aghast: but on perceiving in which direction the eyes of his young mistress were bent, he turned himself round in his chair, and beheld a formidable-looking personage advancing into the room. We may save ourselves the trouble of much description, by declaring at once that the intruder was none other than Captain Cartwright but on the present occasion he was dressed in plain clothes. Scarcely less fierce however was his aspect than on the preceding day when he presented himself to the Hon. Augustus. Softly and Mademoiselle Armatine. His countenance was stern and implacable; and on advancing into the room, he banged the door with such terrific violence that it made the old lord shudder and quake from head to foot with a startled sensation that was immediately followed by a fit of coughing which lasted for several minutes.

Meanwhile Eglantine had covered her face with her hands: and Captain Cartwright, with arms folded across his chest, stood surveying her with the sternest severity.

"And is it thus," he said, "that I find my niece—the pensioned mistress of a nobleman! I came to England for the purpose of giving you a happy home, and making you the heiress of my wealth: I had buoyed myself up with a thousand fond hopes,—hopes of happiness in my declining years, in the society

of a niece who would be unto me as a daughter, and for whom I should find an eligible husband. But all these hopes are destroyed—and my deceased brother's daughter has dishonoured the name of Cartwright—that name which never was dishonoured before!"

"Spare me, dear uncle—spare me!" exclaimed Eglantine, flinging herself with every appearance of the wildest grief at Captain Cartwright's feet. "His lordship is very kind to me—"

"Kind to you, Eglantine?" ejaculated the Captain scornfully: "what means such kindness as this?"

"Sir," interrupted the old nobleman, "I—I—ugh! ugh!—would have you know that I—I—ugh! ugh!—am incapable of treating your niece otherwise than—ugh! ugh!—with kindness."

"It is something in your favour, my lord," answered Captain Cartwright sternly; "but still it will not save you from the chastisement I am bound to inflict upon the seducer of my niece."

"Oh, no, do not touch him! do not injure a hair of his head!" exclaimed Eglantine, starting to her feet and bounding towards the old nobleman, around whose neck her arms were thrown.

"You are a good girl, my dear—ugh! ugh!—you are a good girl," mumbled Wenham. "There! there! don't weep—don't take on so!—sit down my love—ugh! ugh!—and your uncle will presently grow calmer."

Eglantine retired to her chair: but Captain Cartwright remained standing his arms still folded—his looks still sternly severe.

"Lord Wenham," he said, "listen to the few words which I have to address unto you. A beloved brother on his death-bed bequeathed his child to my care. I undertook the charge, vowing to fulfil it affectionately and honourably. My avocations recalled me to India; and I left my niece in the care of an elderly female relative in whom I could confide. She paid the debt of nature some little while back; and then Eglantine, after an interval passed with a friend, went under the protection of my sister-in-law Madame Angelique. And such protection! it has been!—good-heavens, such protection! In a word, my hopes are blighted—and that niece whom to her father on his death-bed I swore to protect and befriend, is

a fallen creature—and *you*, my lord, are her seducer!”

“But she loves me—ugh! ugh!” shrieked forth Wenham, in that same shrill tone to which his voice had ere now risen; “and you shan’t part us—ugh! ugh!—you shan’t part us!”

“Oh, uncle! uncle!” murmured the weeping Eglantine, “pray be not so cruel unto me—Oh!—be not cruel unto me!”

“Cruel, niece?” ejaculated Captain Cartwright: “it is you that have been cruel to the memory of your parents—to me—aye, and unto yourself! But I must tear you hence—from this house of infamy!—you must go with me—and on *you*, my lord, will I inflict such vengeance as the seducer deserves. Not even your years—much less your rank and wealth shall protect you! You are bound to give me satisfaction for the seduction of my niece. A friend of mine will wait upon you presently; and if you refuse I swear that I will horsewhip you publicly—not a horsewhipping for mere show—not a simple laying of the whip upon your shoulder! but such a chastisement as shall bring you within a hair’s-breadth of the grave!”

A shriek thrilled from Eglantine’s lips: again she flung herself at the Captain’s feet—again she implored his mercy. But fiercely seizing her by the wrist, he compelled her to rise; and then, as he tossed her from him, she sank back sobbing convulsively into her chair. Meanwhile the old nobleman had been thrown into such a nervous state of excitement by the dread of losing his beautiful mistress, and by the terrific threats of personal chastisement which the fierce Captain had flung out, that he was almost suffocated and strangled by another fit of coughing.

“If on my return to England,” resumed Captain Cartwright, now addressing Eglantine with mournfulness rather than bitterness perceptible in his tone, “I had found you the honoured wedded wife of this nobleman, or of any other man of station or character, joy would have filled my heart. I should have blessed you—I should have thought with a holy comfort of the manner in which I had fulfilled my vow to your deceased parents: I should not have felt as if I myself were a guilty and perjured being in contemplating the memory of your father.

But instead of hailing you as a wife, I find you living in gilded infamy—Oh, it is terrible to think of! and there is no vengeance, my lord, too deadly to be wreaked on you as this orphan girl’s seducer!”

“But—but,” said the nobleman, quivering with nervousness, and shaken by his hacking cough,—“but—but—ugh! ugh!—is there no means by which this matter can be settled? I—I will place a very large—ugh! ugh!—sum of money in Eglantine’s name—”

“My lord,” interrupted Captain Cartwright sternly, “this is adding insult to injury! What?—think you that the loss of her honour is to be compensated for by gold? Come Eglantine—come directly—I insist upon it!”

“She shan’t go!” screeched forth the old nobleman, who looked as if he were goaded almost to frenzy: “she shan’t go!”

“We shall see, my lord,” answered Cartwright coldly, “Eglantine is under age—I am her natural protector and her guardian: if she refuse to accompany me of her own free will, I must put force into requisition. Come, girl, I say—come!”

“But my dear sir—ugh! ” love her!” exclaimed Lord W
“She is the only good girl I ever—the only one that—ugh! ugh!—not give herself airs: and there—ugh! ugh!”

“But think you, my lord,” demanded the Captain, “that because you love her, I will leave her here as your pensioned mistress? Heaven forbid! Come girl—come!”

“Well, well,” muttered Lord Wenham, “I suppose it must be—ugh! ugh! it must be! Captain Cartwright—ugh! ugh!—But what will the world think? Hang the world ugh! ugh! I should not be the first nobleman that—ugh! ugh!—Besides, how many have married actresses? And then too, no one need know—ugh! ugh!—that Eglantine lived with me first of all. It has only been a matter of a few days. Captain Cartwright, ahem;—ugh! ugh!—I think—ahem!—ugh!—hah!—ahem!—ugh! ugh!”

Thus what with sometimes muttering to himself—sometimes speaking loud enough to be heard—and coughing incessantly from first to last—the old

dotard conveyed an idea of what was passing in his mind.

"You think *what*, my lord?" demanded Cartwright, as Wenham suddenly stopped short.

"I think, Captain—ugh! ugh!" answered the nobleman, "that this little matter—ahem!—hah!—little matter may be perhaps arranged—ugh! ugh!—to the satisfaction of us all. Eglantine is a good girl—and—and—ugh! ugh!—will I am sure make a—ahem!—hah!—make a—you know—ugh!—a very good wife."

"A wild cry of joy thrilled from Eglantine's lips as she flew towards the old nobleman; and again flinging her arms about his neck, she lavished upon him the tenderest and most endearing caresses."

"My lord," said Captain Cartwright, "you are now performing the part of an honourable man. I esteem and respect you—and I feel convinced that my beloved niece *will* make you a most excellent wife. You will have the goodness to give me your solemn written undertaking that the marriage shall be solemnized by special license to-morrow—though under circumstances of as much privacy as possible, so that it may not be known to the world that Eglantine lived under your protection as a mistress before she became a wife. Give me this undertaking, my lord—and I will depart for the present—I will not separate you—I will leave you to the discussion of such preliminaries as may be necessary for all that is to take place."

The old dotard—labouring under a mortal terror of the fierce Captain Cartwright, and equally influenced, though in another sense, by the tender caresses which Eglantine was lavishing upon him—hesitated not to give the written undertaking which the fire-eater demanded.

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE INDIAN COMMISSIONERS.

THE scene once more changes to Shrubbery Villa—the residence of the Princess Indora in the neighbourhood of Notting Hill and Bayswater. The Princess was seated alone in that exquisitely furnished apartment where

we found her on the first occasion that she was introduced to our readers. It was at the back of the drawing-room on the first-floor; and the style of its appointments was altogether oriental. The lamp suspended to the ceiling, shed its soft roseate light through the transparent medium of a pink-tinted globe of glass; and the ottomans, with their red velvet cushions—the crimson draperies, with their massive gold fringes—and the carpet of corresponding dyes appeared to borrow deeper and richer hues from that flood of lustre.

The Princess Indora was seated upon one of the ottomans; and she was arrayed in the most becoming oriental garb. A caftan of purple velvet exquisitely embroidered, and brilliant with gems, set off the fine symmetry of her shape to admirable advantage. Confined at the throat and at the waist, the interval that was left open revealed the rounded contours of the gorgeous bust through the gauzy and almost transparent *chemisetti*. She wore satiny trousers of an azure colour, embroidered and trimmed with the richest lace. Made full in the eastern style, they ballooned down to the ankles, where they were tied: the ankles themselves were bare—and the feet were thrust into morocco slippers of a purple colour ornamented with pearls. According to her custom, the Princess wore no corset, nor indeed were any artificial means of support or compression requisite for form so superbly modelled, and the rich contours of which sustained themselves as nature intended and as if they were the sculptured delineations of a statue.

Be it recollected that the complexion of the Princess Indora was not of gipsy swarthiness, although it was of eastern duskiness; and it differed from that of the brunette of western clime, inasmuch as it was of a clear pale brown. I have said too—but we may repeat here—that the skin had all that fine grained appearance and that animal polish which seemed to indicate that far from the first freshness of youth being lost, it still adhered, unmarr and unimpaired, to a matured and voluptuous womanhood. The warm blood of her eastern origin mantled with carnation tint upon her cheeks—gradually softening away and imperceptibly blending with the pa-

brown purity of the general complexion. To gaze upon the Princess Indora—to observe those masses of luxuriantly flowing hair, dark as night, without wave or curl except at the extremities, but as soft as silk—that faultless profile, with the straight nose, the short upper lip, and the delicately rounded chin—those coal-black eyes, full of a languishing lustre, and curtained at times by the richest ebon fringes that ever constituted a veil which woman could at pleasure draw over her thoughts—to pass on from that countenance of magnificent beauty, and suffer the eye to wander along the line of the throat, till it joined the neck where the bust expanded into such grandly rounded and voluptuously swelling contours—to travel still onward with the gaze, and follow the sweeping outlines of the arms, bare to the shoulders, and modelled with robustness and yet to the most admirable symmetry—to pursue the contemplation to the feet, which were long and shapely, with high insteps—to complete this survey of the living, glowing, animated picture, would be to feast the eyes with one of the most charming and magnificent creations that ever belonged to the sphere of the female sex.

Such indeed was the Princess Indora, who had now really completed her thirty-first year. Ordinarily with eastern women, they are at that age on the wane—their beauty is fading—and in appearance they resemble females of five or six years older in our western climes. But it was not so with Indora. If, in speaking of her age, she had chosen to diminish it by half-a-dozen years, no one would have questioned the truth of her assertion. In every sense was the lustre of her beauty undimmed; while the lapse of time appeared only to add to its gorgeousness and its grandeur. There was a dewy freshness on the rich red lips—the teeth which they disclosed were whiter than ivory, even as if arranged by the nicest mechanical art, and in faultless preservation. Her breath was sweet and balmy as that of a youthful maiden's; and in a word, her appearance was altogether as if she had taken the most studious care to protect her wondrous beauty against all those effects of time and circumstances which could mar its freshness or dim its brightness.

It was at about eight o'clock in the evening that we thus find the Princess Indora seated in her exquisitely furnished apartment—and evidently awaiting some expected arrival. Hopeful happiness was depicted upon her countenance: its light was dancing in the depths of her coal black eyes; and the flutter of her heart was indicated by the quick swelling and sinking of her bosom. What was passing in the mind of the Princess Indora that she was thus hopeful and happy, and yet to a certain extent agitated with suspense? Was it that she thought of her love—that long, faithful, impassioned, and trustful love of her's—and that she had reason to believe it would shortly be crowned with bliss?

Presently the door opened; and Sagoonah made her appearance. A rapid searching glance did the ayah fling upon her mistress as she crossed the threshold—for one single moment too did the vindictive expression of a tigress pass over the features of the Hindoo woman—and then as her eyes instantaneously sank again, she stood before the Princess with her wonted respectful deference of manner.

"What is it, Sagoonah?" inquired Indora hastily. "Is it——"

She stopped short; and the colour heightened upon her cheeks—while the other evidences of her suspense were enhanced.

"Two Commissioners from Inderabad have arrived in London, my lady," answered Sagoonah; "and they crave an immediate audience."

"Two Commissioners?" ejaculated Indora, the colour suddenly vanishing from her cheeks. "What can this mean? Has anything happened to my dear father? It was but the other day that his messengers were here!—But speak, Sagoonah!—what say they?"—and the Princess was painfully excited.

"They said nothing, my lady," answered the ayah, "beyond inquiring in respect to your ladyship's health and in soliciting an immediate audience. But they are in mourning, my lady——"

"In mourning?" echoed Indora, with a half shriek. "Oh, then I must anticipate the worst! But let them enter—introduce them quick!"

Sagoonah hastened to obey the mandate: and in a few moments the two commissioners from Inderabad were

ushered into the presence of the Princess. One was a venerable old man, in whom Indora at once recognised a faithful and long-attached Minister in her father's service: the other was a personage of middle age and wore a military uniform. Him also Indora knew full well: he was one of her father's equerries. Both were men of distinction and of high rank; and, as Sagoonah had intimated, they wore the purple emblems of mourning which were customary when death had to be deplored in to the kingdom of Inderabad.

The two Commissioners prostrated themselves at the feet of Indora: their hearts were evidently full of emotion; and the Princess was seized with a mingled consternation and dismay which forbade her from putting the question that had risen up to her lips. At length the elder Commissioner murmured forth in a tremulous voice, "Gracious Queen, accept the allegiance which we offer for ourselves and on the part of all your Majesty's faithful subjects."

"Ah! then my beloved father is no more!" said Indora, in a deep voice: and covering her countenance with hands, she burst into tears.

The Commissioners rose from their suppliant posture, and stood in attitudes of respect in the presence of her whom they had just hailed as their Queen. Indora appeared to forget their presence:—at that instant one idea was uppermost in her mind—that her father was no more, and that he had died while she was far away in a foreign land. Bitterly, bitterly did the lady weep. Oh, if she could only have been there to close her father's eyes and to receive his last injunctions! Oh, if the wings of a bird could have been given to her at the time, that she might have soared over seas and over lands to minister in the last hours of that beloved father—she would not have to reproach herself now! But she was stricken with remorse; for she felt as if she had been guilty of a crime in being absent from that sire in his supreme moments. At length she recollected that the Commissioners were present: she raised her looks—she wiped her eyes; but in a voice that was deep as if clouded with inward weeping, she said, "Tell me, my friends, how snote my poor

father of his daughter in his last illness?"

"His Majesty," replied the senior Commissioner, "commanded us to bear unto our future Queen the assurances of that paternal love which had never diminished—of that father's fondness which endured until the end."

"My poor father!" murmured Indora, again weeping. "But what else said he?" she inquired, after a few minutes' pause, and again drying her eyes.

"His Majesty commanded us," responded the chief Commissioner, "to assure our future Queen that he left her a Kingdom in the highest state of prosperity—a well filled treasury, and a population that has not to complain of oppressive taxes—a large and well-disciplined army that has cheerfully sworn allegiance to your Majesty as its Queen—thriving towns the wealth and civilization of which are not to be outvied by even the cities of the English in other parts of India. In a word, your Majesty is now, by the will of heaven, called upon to rule over a great and a happy nation, in whose heart your image is enshrined, and who will welcome with enthusiastic acclaims their Lady-Sovereign home."

Indora was profoundly affected, not on account of her father's death, but likewise by the language which the Commissioner thus addressed to her. She wept for the memory of her perished sire—she wept likewise to know herself a Queen. She wept for the lost one—and she wept because a diadem had descended upon her brows. And there—in that villa, which sumptuous though it were, was a mere humble cottage in comparison with the gorgeous palaces of Inderabad,—there sate this lady, the Queen of one of the mightiest independent nations of the East!

The Chief Commissioner proceeded to give her Majesty certain details relative to her father's death, and also with reference to the arrangements that had been made for the government of the kingdom until her return. It appeared that only a couple of days after the King of Inderabad had despatched those messengers, who, as we have already seen, waited upon Indora at her villa, he was seized with a sudden illness, which in a few hours proved fatal. But the instant his

"All?" echoed Mr. Redcliffe. "Yes it *must* be so—or else you would never have gone——"

"Ah! you know that I went thither?" ejaculated Indora, at once penetrating his thoughts.

"Yes—but let me explain presently," said Mr. Redcliffe. "Tell me, Indora—how did you learn everything——"

"And I also will explain presently!" rejoined the eastern lady. "First let us speak of that which is nearest to us—and dearest at least to *me*. You have discovered that she whom you sought is no more—is it not so? is it not that which you would have me understand?"

"It is," answered Redcliffe. "And now listen to me, Indora. No one can be insensible of the boundless—the illimitable love which you have borne for me; and it is impossible I can repay it with ingratitude. On the former occasions when we met within these walls, I spoke—and perhaps spoke harshly—of my long, long detention in your royal father's capital: but *that* I have forgotten—or at least forgiven. I know that you love me, Indora; you have given many, many proofs of it—and it is not in my nature——no, by heaven! it is not in my nature to plant a dagger in such a heart as your's!"

"Clement," murmured Indora, "these words from your lips infuse an unknown happiness into my soul!"

"Yet listen to me again," resumed Redcliffe, still retaining her hand in his own. "The power of loving as I once loved—another——" and his voice faltered—"is dead within me. But, if, all other circumstances apart, you can accept the hand of one who will esteem and cherish you—who will lavish upon you all that tenderness which your own long-enduring love so much merits—if you can be contented with an affectionate friendship which in itself will be a real love,—then, Indora, you may claim me as a husband."

Tears trickled down the lady's cheeks—for her heart was full of ineffable emotions: the words she would have spoken died upon her lips—but to those lips she pressed Clement Redcliffe's hand.

"Listen to me again, Indora," he continued, himself deeply moved. "You are beautiful—the handsomest of living woman! You retain too all

the first freshness of your youth—the jettness of your hair will not for years to come be streaked with grey—not the lustre of your eyes be dimmed. But how different is it with me! Though still in my prime, so far as years are concerned, yet am I prematurely old. *My* hair is streaked with grey—and Oh! if the sorrows, the afflictions, and the wretchedness I have endured be taken into account, it were no marvel if I were bowed down as though it were with an intolerable burden!"

"Continue not thus, Clement!" interrupted Indora, pressing his hand to her bosom and then to her lips. "As I have assured you before, I repeat the assurance now—that I only behold in you the idol of my own imagination. I see you as you were when first I learnt to love you in the far-off city of Indorabad; and, Oh! I shall ever love you! Though all in an instant your hair were to turn white, and your form were to be bowed, and you were to present the appearance of old age's decrepitude, I should love you—Oh, I love you just the same! And think you, Clement, that there is not gratitude mixed up with this love of mine? Think you I can be unmindful that it was you who were the preceptor of my childhood—who taught me whatsoever accomplishments I possess—and what is more," added Indora solemnly, and in the fervour of a grateful piety, "who instructed me in the sublime truths of Christianity? Or again, think you that I am unmindful of how you introduced the arts and sciences of civilization into my father's Kingdom—how you taught him a liberal and enlightened policy—and how by virtue of your lessons he was enabled to advance his people to the highest point of prosperity and happiness? No, Clement—I have forgotten naught of all these things; and thus you see how fervid gratitude is interwoven with my love!"

Never had Indora seemed more eminently beautiful than while thus giving expression to those eloquent outpourings which flowed from her very heart. There was something sublime as well as something ineffably touching in her loveliness at that moment—something grand and pathetic—splendid, and at the same time indescribably interesting, in her looks. Redcliffe would have been something less or

leading towards the main road, he felt as if he were still followed by Sagoonah's haunting eyes.

CHAPTER XCV.

THE CONSERVATORY.

THE dusk was setting in on the evening of the following day, when two individuals who had been walking and holding a long discourse together in the neighbourhood of Oaklands, shook hands and separated. One was Purvis, the old steward, who now retraced his way towards Marchmont's ducal seat: the other was Clement Redcliffe, who hastily struck across the fields in the direction of a cottage where he had been wont to take up his quarters on the three or four occasions that he had visited this part of the country.

In a few minutes he reached the road, along which he had to continue his way for about a quarter of a mile, in order to arrive at that cottage: but he was destined to experience an adventure ere that walk, brief though it were, was accomplished. For as he was proceeding along, it struck him that he observed a female form lying by the side of the road in the shade of the hedge. He approached the object, and found that his surmise was correct. A female lay motionless there, with her face downward; and Redcliffe was instantaneously smitten with the idea that it was a corpse which he looked upon. He hastened to raise her up; and so far as the obscurity of the evening would permit, he saw that she was decently clad, that she was a woman of tall stature, and that she possessed the remains if not of actual beauty, at least of a countenance that had not been ill-looking. The woman was comparatively young too—not many years beyond thirty: but she had a haggard careworn aspect. Her eyes were closed: the warmth of life was however in her; and Redcliffe was thus relieved from the idea that he was gazing upon the victim of a foul crime, or of starvation, exhaustion, or of sudden natural death.

The cottage, as we have said, was at no great distance: and thither

Mr. Redcliffe hastily bore the woman in his arms. The occupants of the little habitation at once received her: for they were entirely obedient to the will of Mr. Redcliffe, whose liberality as a paymaster they had experienced on more occasions than one. The unconscious female was placed upon a couch; and by the means adopted to restore her she was so far brought back to life as to leave little or no apprehension as to the result. Still she continued in a state of unconsciousness as to what was passing around her; and having slowly opened her eyes, she closed them again,—their temporary expression being full of a listless vacancy.

"She cannot be an ordinary tramp," said Mr. Redcliffe to the woman of the cottage. "Perhaps she is subject to fits——"

"Or else she fell down, sir, through sheer exhaustion? For look! her shoes are completely worn through—aye, and the stockings likewise!—her poor feet are all cut and bleeding. I will foment them with hot water; and this may likewise tend to bring her back to consciousness."

"Do so," said Mr. Redcliffe. "But perhaps it would be as well to ascertain if we can who she is? Probably," he added, as the circumstances of Crazy Jane flashed to his memory, and suggested the remark he was now making,—“she may be some unfortunate idiot who has escaped from her friends: for her apparel is decent, and she has not the air of one who by ordinary circumstances could be reduced to houseless wanderings, penury, and destitution. I will leave this room—and you can join me presently in the parlour, when you have searched her person thoroughly; so that if there should happen to be any letters or papers about her, you can bring them to me.”

This scene took place in a bedchamber to which the woman had been borne; and Mr. Redcliffe descended to the parlour which he occupied at the cottage. In about ten minutes the elderly female who was left in attendance upon her, and who was the mistress of the little habitation, rejoined Mr. Redcliffe, who instantaneously perceived that she bore several articles in her hands.

"The poor creature is very far from being a common tramp," said the woman: "for, look here, sir!—there is a purse well filled with gold and silver—several jewellery-trinkets—and this sealed packet."

Mr. Redcliffe took the articles; and opening the purse, he found that it contained about twenty guineas: the jewels were old fashioned, and might be worth a similar sum: the sealed packet had no address upon it.

"Is the woman recovering?" he inquired.

"She every now and then opens her eyes, sir," was the response,—“looks vacantly up—and then closes them again. I am pretty sure she will recover: but what are we to do with her? If she has any friends, they may be anxious about her——”

"That is precisely what I am thinking," said Mr. Redcliffe; "and therefore, although under any circumstances I dislike opening private papers,—yet on the present occasion such a course seems absolutely necessary. Go back to the poor woman—do your best for her—and in the meanwhile I will see whether this packet will afford us any clue to the knowledge of who she is."

The elderly female retired from the parlour, and Mr. Redcliffe broke the seal of the packet. It contained a letter the address of which made him start suddenly; and he unhesitatingly commenced the perusal of the document. It was a long one: and profound was the interest with which Mr. Redcliffe scanned its contents. When he had concluded, he remained for some minutes absorbed in a profound solemn reverie; and then he murmured to himself, "Truly the finger of heaven has of late been manifesting itself in signal and marvellous ways for the development of the deepest mysteries! Here is another link in the chain of evidence—But who can this woman be?"

In a few minutes the mistress of the cottage reappeared,—saying, "Have you discovered, sir, who she is?"

"No," replied Mr. Redcliffe, "and more than ever am I anxious to make that discovery. By a singular coincidence this letter regards a certain business in which I am deeply interested: but it affords no clue as to who the woman herself may be. Does she get better?"

"She still lingers in a sort of swoon," was the answer: "but two or three times she has again opened her eyes; and once her lips moved as if she were trying to say something. What do you think, sir, had better be done? Ah, here is my old man come back from the village!" ejaculated the woman, as the cottage-door opened at the instant and heavy footsteps were heard in the little passage which divided the two ground-floor rooms of the humble dwelling.

"He must hasten off to the village again and fetch a surgeon," answered Mr. Redcliffe. "Go and tell him to do so."

The woman issued from the room; and her husband almost immediately took his departure again, for the purpose of executing the commission with which he was now charged. His wife returned to the parlour, to see if Mr. Redcliffe had any further instructions to issue.

"I am compelled to go out again presently," said Mr. Redcliffe: "you must therefore continue to do your best for this poor woman; and when the surgeon arrives, you can tell him under what circumstances she was discovered in the road. You may mention, if you choose, that she possesses this money and these trinkets: but you will say nothing about the sealed packet,—of which I shall retain possession, at least for the present. If the poor creature herself returns fully to consciousness before I come back—and if she should ask concerning her property—you can show her that her money and her jewels are safe; and you can tell her that the packet is in the hands of the gentleman who found her in the road—that he will take great care of it—and that I wish to have some conversation with her in respect to its contents."

Having issued these instructions, Mr. Redcliffe resumed his cloak: for the evening was chill, and a mist was rising. Going forth from the cottage, he pursued his way for a short distance along the road—and thence he struck into the fields, across which he proceeded in the direction of Oaklands. It was now about nine o'clock in the evening; and the mist was growing into the density of a fog. A stranger in those parts would not have found his way towards the mansion through the obscurity: but Mr. Redcliffe appeared to be well acquainted with

every inch of the ground; and he soon reached the spacious gardens belonging to the ducal country-seat. He halted at the pediment of a particular statue; and there in a few minutes he was joined by the old steward Purvis.

Only a few words were exchanged between them; and they proceeded together towards the mansion. They reached a large greenhouse or conservatory, which was built against the length of one entire side of the edifice, and into which the windows of a suite of three rooms opened. The reader will therefore understand that there were means of communication from those rooms with the conservatory: but we must add that there was likewise a door opening from the conservatory itself into the garden. It was towards this door that Purvis and Mr. Redcliffe proceeded; and the old steward opened it by means of a key which he had taken care to have about him. Mr. Redcliffe entered: Purvis gently closed the door behind him—and hurrying away, re-entered the mansion by another mode of ingress.

Into the conservatory looked the windows of the dining-room that was used on ordinary occasions, as well as those of the library and billiard-room. From one of these apartments only were lights now shining; and this was the dining-room. Within that room two individuals were seated at a table covered with dessert and wine: these individuals were the Duke of Marchmont and the Hon. Wilson Stanhope.

Mr. Redcliffe advanced cautiously and noiselessly—amidst the rare exotics, the choice plants, and the tropical trees with which the conservatory was crowded—towards the window which was nearest to the table where the Duke and his guest were seated. The draperies were so far drawn over all the windows that they only suffered the light to penetrate through narrow openings; and thus, as the reader will understand, the casements themselves were almost completely veiled from the eyes of those who were seated inside the apartment. Through the opening in the curtains Mr. Redcliffe noticed them; and with the utmost caution he unfastened the casement. Doubtless he had been already informed by Purvis that he might risk this much; and he had also received the assurance that the casement would yield to his touch.

It did so: and opening it to the extent of two or three inches, he could not overhear whatsoever passed betwixt the Duke and his guest. So well built was the conservatory, and so warm was the air therein from the effect of artificial heat that no draught could penetrate through the opening of the casement, and thus there was nothing to lead the Duke or Mr. Stanhope to suspect that the window was open at all. We must add that Stanhope sat with his back to Mr. Redcliffe; and consequently the Duke of Marchmont had his face towards him.

"And now will your Grace at length be explicit?" inquired Stanhope, as he filled his glass from one of the exquisitely cut decanters.

"Let us take a little more wine," responded the Duke, "before we get the dry details of business."

"So far from taking any more wine," said Wilson Stanhope, "I think I ought to keep my head clear; for it can assuredly be no ordinary matter on which your lordship is about to speak."

"I admit that it is important," rejoined the Duke: "I have already told you so."

"But more important, I fancy," observed Stanhope, "that your Grace has hitherto given me to understand. At first you were so enter into explanations the other night at the Clarendon Hotel, when I dined with you——"

"I do not think that I promised to be explicit on that occasion," answered the Duke. "I merely told you that after our wine, on that particular evening, I would take and introduce you to your intended mistress, the beautiful Marion; and I fulfilled my promise. In a word, Stanhope, I have been true to every promise I made you: the five hundred pounds were paid into banker's to your account——"

"Yes, my lord," interrupted Stanhope, "you have done all this; and it is because you have done so much that I can judge of the importance of the service, whatever it may be, in which you seek to engage me. You could not or you would not, tell me in London but you make an appointment for me to meet you privately down here——"

"To be sure!" ejaculated Marchmont—"where we could dine together *tête à tête*, as we have done—and when without fear of being interrupted a

overheard, we may discuss the service that I need at your hands."

"And now, the sooner that discussion commences, the better," observed Stanhope. "I am open to almost anything: but I love not suspense. It is like groping one's way in the dark—And, ah! by the bye, my lord, I hope that whatsoever new task you are about to confide to me, will not be baffled and defeated so completely as the former one was—I mean with respect to that affair of the Duchess—"

"Enough!" interrupted the Duke impatiently. "Think you that I could for a moment misunderstand your meaning?"

"And now with regard to the present business?" said Stanhope.

"You are a man," resumed the Duke of Marchmont, "of expensive habits—accustomed to luxurious living; and the sum of five hundred pounds which I paid into your account the other day, will prove but as a drop to the ocean in comparison with your lavish mode of expenditure. Indeed, you are a man, Stanhope, who ought to be able to reckon your money by thousand instead of by hundreds."

"If all this," exclaimed Stanhope, "is to lead to the assurance that your Grace can put me in the way of gaining thousands, it will assuredly be the most welcome intelligence that I shall have heard for a very long time past."

"It is the truth that I am telling you!" rejoined the Duke of Marchmont: and then he added after a pause in a lower tone, and fixing his looks significantly upon his guest, "It is not five, not ten, not fifteen thousand pounds that I should hesitate to place at your hands, if you could only accomplish the aim which I have in view."

Mr. Redcliffe fancied that Wilson Stanhope must have been astounded by this announcement: for although he could not see that individual's face, he could nevertheless judge by his manner, as well as by his prolonged silence, that he was gazing in a sort of stupefied amazement upon the Duke of Marchmont. As for the Duke himself, he kept his eyes riveted with a peculiar significance upon Stanhope, as if endeavouring to foreshadow by his looks that further elucidation of his purpose which he hardly knew how

to shape in words. For even when villain is talking to villain there is a height of villany which embarrasses the one how to purpose it in all its hideous details to the other. The lustre of the lamp shone full upon the countenance of Marchmont: a few minutes back it had been flushed with wine—but now it was very pale; and it wore so sinister an expression that Redcliffe shuddered, and could even have groaned in his horror, were he not sensible of the necessity of keeping on his guard, and were he not likewise thoroughly master of his feelings and emotions.

"So many thousands of pounds!" said Stanhope, at length breaking that long silence, and speaking as if he were still in a state of wondering incredulity. "Why, my lord," he added in a voice that became suddenly hoarse, "it can be little short of murder that you wish me to do at such a price and for such a reward!"

"And if it were," said the Duke, in a tone that was scarcely audible to Mr. Redcliffe at the easement,—“would you—”

"Would I undertake it?—But this is ridiculous!" ejaculated Mr. Stanhope. "Your Grace is playing a part—heaven knows for what purpose!—or else you are joking. And let me tell you that the jest is a very sorry one!"

"And if I were *not* joking," said the Duke,—“if I were serious—”

"Then I should say," rejoined Stanhope quickly, "that having got hold of a man whose circumstances were the other day desyrate, and may soon become desperate again—you are holding out to him such a temptation—But, pshaw! you do not mean it!"

"I tell you that I mean it," answered the Duke, with the air of a man who was suddenly resolved to beat about the bush no longer, "but come to the point."

"You mean it!" said Stanhope: and then there was another long pause, during which they eyed each other with that significance which characterizes villany when coming to an understanding with villany.

"Now listen to me," resumed the Duke of Marchmont. "We are speaking within four walls: and I know it is impossible there can be any one to overhear us. If you fall into my views, good and well: but if you think to draw forth explanations from my lips

overheard, we may discuss the service that I need at your hands."

"And now, the sooner that discussion commences, the better," observed Stanhope. "I am open to almost anything: but I love not suspense. It is like groping one's way in the dark—And, ah! by the bye, my lord, I hope that whatsoever new task you are about to confide to me, will not be baffled and defeated so completely as the former one was—I mean with respect to that affair of the Duchess—"

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"If all this," exclaimed Stanhope, "is to lead to the assurance that your Grace can put me in the way of gaining thousands, it will assuredly be the most welcome intelligence that I shall have heard for a very long time past."

"It is the truth that I am telling you!" rejoined the Duke of Marchmont: and then he added after a pause in a lower tone, and fixing his looks significantly upon his guest, "It is not five, not ten, not fifteen thousand pounds that I should hesitate to place in your hands, if you could only accomplish the aim which I have in view."

Mr. Redcliffe fancied that Wilson Stanhope must have been astounded by this announcement: for although he could not see that individual's face, he could nevertheless judge by his manner, as well as by his prolonged silence, that he was gazing in a sort of stupefied amazement upon the Duke of Marchmont. As for the Duke himself, he kept his eyes riveted with a peculiar significance upon Stanhope, as if endeavouring to foreshadow by his looks that further elucidation of his purpose which he hardly knew how

to shape in words. For even when villain is talking to villain there is a height of villany which embarrasses the one how to purpose it in all its hideous details to the other. The lustre of the lamp shone full upon the countenance of Marchmont: a few minutes back it had been flushed with wine—but now it was very pale; and it wore so sinister an expression that Redcliffe shuddered, and could even have groined in his horror, were he not sensible of the necessity of keeping on his guard, and were he not likewise thoroughly master of his feelings and emotions.

"So many thousands of pounds!" said Stanhope, at length breaking that long silence, and speaking as if he were still in a state of wondering incredulity. "Why, my lord," he added in a voice that became suddenly hoarse, "it can be little short of murder that you wish me to do at such a price and for such a reward!"

"And if it were," said the Duke, in a tone that was scarcely audible to Mr. Redcliffe at the easement,—“would you—”

"Would I undertake it?—But this is ridiculous!" ejaculated Mr. Stanhope. "Your Grace is playing a part—heaven knows for what purpose!—or else you are joking. And let me tell you that the jest is a very sorry one!"

"And if I were *not* joking," said the Duke,—“if I were serious—”

"Then I should say," rejoined Stanhope quickly, "that having got hold of a man whose circumstances were the other day desperate, and may soon become desperate again—you are holding out to him such a temptation—But, pshaw! you do not mean it!"

"I tell you that I mean it," said the Duke, with the air of one who was suddenly resolved to the bush no longer, "point."

"You mean it!" said Stanhope: and then there was another long pause, during which they eyed each other with that significance which characterizes villany when coming to an understanding with villany.

"Now listen to me," resumed the Duke of Marchmont. "We are speaking within four walls: and I know it is impossible there can be any one to overhear us. If you fall into my views, good and well: but if you think to draw forth explanations from my lips

in order that *without* executing my purpose, you may henceforth exercise a power over me,—you will be mistaken! For were you perfidiously to breathe a syllable in betrayal of what is now taking place, I should indignantly deny it: and who would believe your word against that of the Duke of Marchmont? You see that I am speaking candidly, Stanhope—because candour is necessary under the circumstances."

"I do not find fault with your Grace for thus acting," answered Stanhope; "and now at least I know that you are serious. Proceed, my lord: there can be no harm done in giving your explanations."

"They are brief," responded the Duke; "and not many minutes need elapse ere you will have to come to a decision. There is a certain woman—a lady I ought to call her who by some means has mixed herself up most unpleasantly in certain affairs of mine. She may mean nothing more than what she has hitherto done: or, on the other hand, she may mean a great deal more and is only biding her time. I have every reason to apprehend that this latter supposition is the true one;—therefore am I desirous—In plain terms, Stanhope, this woman is an enemy whom—whom I must—Perdition seize it! Let the words be spoken:—whom I must remove from my path. Ask me not for further explanations: but say—and say quickly, Stanhope—to what extent I may count upon your assistance?"

"Now, look you, my lord," said Wilson Stanhope. "As to whether I will do this or anything else for such a sum, as fifteen thousand pounds—mark! you have said fifteen thousand pounds!—is a question speedily settled. I will. But in saying this, I can of course only speak conditionally. If there is very much risk—so much that one's neck must approach uncomfortably near a halter—I should think it is a venture on which you could scarcely expect me to embark. Therefore when I say I will do it, it is in the belief that you have already devised some plan which you merely require me to carry out."

"I have," answered the Duke of Marchmont. "The lady of whom I am speaking, frequently walks in her garden in the cool of the evening; and although we are now entering upon

the autumnal month of September, I know that she still continues rambles in that garden, apparent absorbed in reverie, even after dusk has closed in. Sometimes she is accompanied by a young lady who lives with her—at other times she is attended by a female servant; occasionally she is alone. Of this I am assured: for during the last fortnight I have frequently watched in the neighbourhood."

"Proceed, my lord," said Stanhope, refilling his glass.

"It is for you to seize an opportunity when she is alone," continued the Duke of Marchmont; "there approaches to her residence by which you may steal thither unperceived—"

"Stop, my lord!" said Wilson Stanhope: "all this is very well—and comprehend you easily enough, a dagger or a pistol would rid you of this female enemy of your s. . . But what about the reward? If once the deed is done, what guarantee have I that my recompense is forthcoming? Will you give it me first of all?"

"First of all!" echoed the Duke. "And then what guarantee have I that you will perform *your* part?"

"Now your Grace sees the difficulty," coolly remarked Wilson Stanhope. "In plain terms, we cannot trust each other. You will not give me the reward beforehand: and I will not undertake the business without the prepayment of the reward. Suppose that I did—and suppose the deed to be done: I come to your Grace—you assume the indignation—you play the virtuous—you repudiate me—and what redress have I? To threaten in such a case would be foolish: your lordship would laugh at my threats! As for carrying them out, it would be madness; because on my part it would be giving my neck to a halter, with only the remote chance that you would swing next to me on the same gibbet."

"You refuse, therefore," said Marchmont.

"I refuse," replied Stanhope,—"unless every shilling—No!" he interrupted himself, "I will effect a compromise with you. You have specified the recompense at fifteen thousand pounds: give me the half—seven thousand five hundred—and I swear to do the deed, trusting to your honour to pay me the remainder."

"Did you suppose, my lord," inquired Stanhope, "that anybody was listening or looking on? For if so, we may have placed ourselves in no very comfortable predicament——"

"It was nothing!—rest assured it was nothing!" hastily interrupted the Duke of Marchmont, making incredible efforts to regain his self-possession.

"Nothing?" ejaculated Stanhope impatiently.—"it is preposterous to tell me that it was nothing, when you were so awfully alarmed. If I believed in ghosts, I should veritably fancy you had seen one."

"A ghost?"—and it was with a countenance as white as a sheet that the Duke of Marchmont now gazed upon the Hon. Wilson Stanhope.

"By heaven," cried the latter, who was himself almost as much alarmed as astonished, "there must be something in all this! Did you fancy that you saw some one? He may have escaped!"—Stanhope rushed to the outer door of the conservatory. "Looked! fast looked! But these windows—they belong to other rooms!—and seal the casements open! they are not fastened inside! My lord, if it were one of your domestics who is playing the spy upon you, I would counsel you to take heed. As for myself, I wash my hands altogether of the business you propose to me—I will have nothing to do with it—I wish to heaven that you had not even spoken to me on the subject! There is such a thing as running one's head into a noose at the very instant one thinks that safety and security are the most complete."

Stanhope spoke with considerable vehemence and excitement; and his speech had been interrupted by the hurried visits he paid to the door of the conservatory and to the casements of the adjoining billiard-room and library. The Duke listened to him with a sort of dismayed stupefaction, as well as with haggard looks. He spoke not a word;

hastening, or rather staggering back, he inebriated into the dining-room, he tossed off a large bumper of wine. Then, still in silence, he replaced his cheque-book in the writing-case, which he was about to lock,—when Stanhope, who had followed him thither, laid his hand upon his shoulder. The Duke, who had not perceived that he was so near, started with a visible tremor: and

again his haggard looks contemplated Stanhope with a kind of vacillating dismay.

"My lord," said the latter, "there is something more in all this than I comprehend. Either you were smitten with a real terror or a fanciful one. If the former, there must be a real danger which I now incur as well as yourself; and if the latter, you must have a very evil conscience. At all events it may be worth your lordship's while to keep on friendly terms with me; and therefore you will scarcely lock up the writing-desk until you have given me some token of——what shall we call it——your liberality——that term will do——and Stanhope chuckled ironically.

For a moment the Duke of Marchmont appeared inclined to resist with indignation his extortionate demand; but a second thought induced him to yield. He accordingly drew forth the cheque-book, and filled in a draft for a thousand guineas instead of for upwards of seven times that sum, as he had at first intended. Stanhope took the cheque—glanced at its contents—and on seeing the amount, consigned it to his pocket with a complacent smile as if he thought that when the sum had been dissipated he might reckon upon procuring more from the same quarter. He did not care to press the Duke for any farther explanation as to the reason which had taken place: he saw that the topic was an unpleasant one: but he had his suspicion that the hint he had thrown out relative to the darkness of the nobleman's conscience was very far from being incorrect.

The Duke remained abstracted and thoughtful for the rest of the evening; and Stanhope, anxious to escape from such gloomy companionship, retired early to the apartment which was provided for his reception. The instant that Marchmont was left alone, he rang the bell, and ordered Purvis to be immediately sent to him. The old steward soon made his appearance, with his habitual demeanour of respectfulness; and the Duke—motioning him to advance close up to where he had halted from a troubled walk to and fro—said in a deep voice, "Purvis, something strange again has occurred this evening."

"Strange, my lord?" said the old steward. "And what is it?"

"You remember that dream of mine—if it were a dream—But I begin to doubt—In short," added Marchmont, most cruelly perplexed, "I know not what to think—But who, Purvis," he suddenly demanded, "keeps the key of the conservatory?"

"It is always in my custody, my lord," responded the old steward. "When the head-gardener requires it, I give it to him: but he always restores it to me—for as Oaklands is so seldom occupied now by your lordship and her Grace, I am always afraid of a set of idle tramps and vagabonds getting into the place."

"Who has the key at this moment?—who has had it all the evening?" demanded the Duke hastily.

"It is here, my lord," replied Purvis, producing the key; "and the gardener has not had it in his possession since the forenoon."

"But those other rooms," said the Duke,—"think you that anybody could have penetrated into them?"

"Not without my knowledge, my lord," responded the steward: "or at all events not without the knowledge of at least some of the servants. But may I be so bold as to inquire why your Grace asks?"

"It is strange—most strange!" muttered the Duke to himself. "Can the dead reappear?—or if he be living, has he come to revisit these scenes which—"

"I am afraid," said Purvis, "that something unpleasant has occurred to your Grace; for your looks are very much discomposed—"

"Enough for the present!" interrupted Marchmont. "I possess a feverish fancy when I think of certain things. Take care, Purvis, that all the doors are carefully locked before you retire to rest. And look well through all the rooms—behind the draperies—in every nook and corner, indeed; for the house is spacious—and it is so easy for any evil designing person to enter and hide himself. See that you attend to my instructions: but do not appear to be more assiduous on these points than usual in the presence of the other domestics."

The Duke of Marchmont waved his hand for Purvis to retire; and he then proceeded to his own chamber, where he locked himself in.

We must now return to Mr. Redcliffe.

After parting from the old steward at the statue, he sped along in the direction of the cottage, where he had left the unknown woman whom he had picked up in the road, as already described. During the short space of time occupied in retracing his way towards that cottage, Mr. Redcliffe reflected upon all that had occurred at Oaklands; and most painful were these reflections. That Queen Indora was the object of the Duke's murderous machinations, he well knew: but that he had paralysed them he was almost equally certain. And now, on his return to the cottage, he hoped to be enabled to receive some explanation from the stranger woman's lips as to how she had become possessed of the letter contained in the sealed packet: but he was doomed to disappointment. For on re-entering the cottage, he at once learnt from the mistress thereof that the woman was gone.

"Gone!" ejaculated Mr. Redcliffe. "What do you mean?—that she is gone of her own accord? or that the surgeon ordered her to be removed?"

"No, sir," answered the elderly female; "she went away of her own accord."

Mr. Redcliffe passed into his little parlour, the mistress of the house following him; and he then learnt the following explanations:—

Shortly after he had left the cottage on his visit to Oaklands, the woman had begun to rally far more rapidly than at first; and she soon recovered her consciousness. She exhibited mingled terror and astonishment at finding herself in a strange place: then she rapidly felt about her person in search of her property. The mistress of the cottage at once bade her banish all alarm from her mind, for that she was where she would be taken care of well; she then showed her that her money and her trinkets were safe. But the stranger woman demanded the sealed packet which she had had about her person; and then the mistress of the cottage stated what Mr. Redcliffe had bidden her announce: namely, that it was taken care of on her behalf by the gentleman who had picked her up in the road, and that he wished to have some conversation with her on the subject. The stranger woman demanded who the gentleman was: but the mistress of the cottage,

regarded her occasional lodger, gave some evasive response, which only had the effect of increasing the stranger's apprehensions. She vowed that she must depart that instant—that she had a long journey to perform, and important business on hand—that she could not therefore wait. The elderly female fancying that her unfortunate guest was half bereft of reason, entreated her to remain: but nothing could induce her—and she took her precipitate departure, forcing upon her hostess a few shillings in payment of a pair of shoes which the latter insisted upon her taking as substitutes for her own worn-out ones. Thus, when the surgeon arrived, the woman who was to have been his patient had taken her departure.

"There is something exceedingly mysterious in all this," said Mr. Redcliffe. "That woman is no unfortunate idiot, as I had at first supposed: she must be conscious of some misdeed that she has fled thus precipitately. Did she give you no explanation of how she came to sink down upon the road?"

"She said something about exhaustion," was the reply given by the mistress of the cottage; "but she would not tarry to eat so much as a morsel of bread: she merely took a cup of milk—and when I offered to put some food into a little basket for her, she did not appear to listen: she seemed all in a hurry, as if afraid of something, so that I myself thought she could not be altogether right."

"And the surgeon?" said Mr. Redcliffe, inquiring.

"He rode across on his pony; and on finding that the woman had gone, he grumbled a little—until I assured him that there was a gentleman here who would pay him handsomely. He then went away better pleased. But my husband is not come back from the village yet; and I can't think what detains him."

Scarcely had the woman thus spoken, when the outer door of the cottage was heard to yield to the entrance of some one; and this proved to be the husband on whose account she had been getting anxious.

"Why, what was detained you?" she asked. "You never yet have been given to tipping at the alehouse——"

"And I'm not going to do so now, wife," he replied, "But in the first

place there's so thick a mist one can hardly see a yard in front of one; at then Smithers the carrier had just arrived, and he had brought with him some handbills from Guildford, which we all got reading at the bar of the Blue Lion."

"And what are the handbills about?"

"Oh! about some dreadful thing that have been discovered up in London yonder—a house where it's supposed three or four people have been murdered at different times, and buried with quicklime in a pit. And so these bills are to offer a hundred pound's reward to any body who gives the people into custody—what's their names again? Oh, here it is in large print—John Smedley and his wife Barbara—or fifty pounds for either of them separate."

"Let's look," said the woman: and she proceeded to read one of the handbills which her husband had brought with him. "Well now, this is odd!" she ejaculated in a voice of mingled wonder and terror: "why, the description of the woman—dear me! it is the very same! Tall—dark—fine eyes—good teeth—age, about three or four and thirty——"

Here the woman's ejaculations were suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Redcliffe. The colloquy between the husband and wife had taken place in the passage; and the door of Mr. Redcliffe's parlour stood ajar. He could not therefore help overhearing what thus passed; and when the conversation took the turn just described, he issued forth, inquiring, "Where are these handbills?"

One was immediately given to him: he hastily scanned its contents; and not a doubt rested in his mind that the woman who had been the object of so much kind attention on his part, was proclaimed as a murderess. The old man of the cottage—who, he it recollected, had not seen the woman at all—was stricken with dismay on learning what sort of a character had been within the walls of the dwelling; and he was by no means sorry to find that her stay had been comparatively so brief.

"It were madness," said Mr. Redcliffe, after a few moments' reflection, "to think of overtaking her through this dense fog. Besides, she has got at least an hour and a half's start of us; and then, as she has money too, she

will find means of conveyance. My good friends," added Mr. Redcliffe, "as you are well aware that I have no inclination to be talked about, and do not want my name mentioned, it would be quite as well if nothing were said about the vile woman having been in your cottage. The cause of justice will not suffer on that account: for with this distribution of handbills all over the country, and with the other means which the police are doubtless taking for the detection of herself and her husband, those wretches cannot possibly escape."

The cottager and his wife, who were accustomed to pay implicit obedience to Mr. Redcliffe, promised to be silent in respect to the subject he had named; and when he took his departure at an early hour on the following morning, he rewarded them with even more than his accustomed liberality. But in respect to the paper which had fallen into his possession, what could he think? That its writer had been murdered, and that he was one of the victims to whom the contents of the handbill so terribly pointed. Yes—this was the natural though fearful conjecture which suggested itself to Mr. Redcliffe's mind: but he resolved to set inquiries on foot in order to ascertain if any certain clue could possibly be discovered to the fate of the writer of that letter.

CHAPTER XCVII.

A STRANGE GUEST AT OAKLANDS.

THE Duke of Marchmont, as we have said, retired to his own chamber and looked himself in. But he did not seek his couch: he felt that it were useless to lay himself down thereon, for that he could not sleep. His soul had received a shock far more profound than even Wilson Stanhope himself had suspected at the time.

The Duke first of all examined the room carefully,—even condescending to look beneath the bed and behind all the draperies; and with an equal degree of scrutiny did he search the dressing-room adjoining. We have used the word *condescend* because it is ever a humiliating thing for a man to admit even unto himself that he is a coward; and with some haughty minds it is a difficult thing for them to bend to any proceeding that

in itself proclaims their cowardice. But the Duke of Marchmont was indeed a coward now; and it was conscience that made him so.

Having completed the investigation of his bed-chamber and the dressing-room adjoining, the Duke opened his pistol-case and proceeded to load the weapons. But in the midst of the operation he desisted: he pressed his hand to his brow—and murmured to himself, "If *he* be really alive, can I do this?" and he glanced shudderingly at the pistols in the open case.

He threw himself upon a seat, and reflected profoundly. Slow but deep—gradual but strongly marked, were the workings of his countenance, as varied thoughts passed through his brain.

"What can all this mean?" he asked himself: "what omens are portended? Why was it that *she*—that eastern woman—came hither? and why does she seem to be taking up a cause with which she can have no earthly concern? And why does *he* haunt me now? Oh, could that I could persuade myself it were all a dream! But if she—that eastern lady—were removed from my path—and if *he*—*he* likewise ceased to exist—what cause of future apprehension would remain?"

The Duke rose from his seat, and slowly paced to and fro in the chamber. At length he halted at the table on which the pistol-case lay; and as if suddenly making up his mind, he muttered between his teeth, while his countenance assumed an air of firm resolve. "Yes—by heaven! any!—no matter what—so long as I my path of those who dare themselves in it!"

The Duke then finished loading his pistols: and he deposited the case on a small table by the side of his bed.

"Now," he said, with a den of savagery settling for the first upon his features, "*he* may again if he will; and if it be a corporeal substance that he seem to be as a living denizen of this—by heaven, his next appearance be the last! Without compunct without remorse, will I stretch him less on the floor! No more punitivity on my part!—no more vain idle terrors!—for it is only by my yielding to them that he has encouraged to renew his pranks endeavour to work upon my fears,

fool that I was to betray myself in the presence of Stanhope! But it is for the last time. And now, despite his declaration that he washes his hands of the business I propose to him he shall undertake it; and by rendering him criminal—by making him an accomplice, I shall cease to be at his mercy, as I now more or less am: for unfortunately the incident of this evening has given him an advantage over me.”

The Duke of Marchmont endeavoured to persuade himself—or we might even say, strove hard to make himself feel that his mind was now composed and settled once again since he had resolved upon a particular course of action: but he could not shut out from his convictions that his soul had received a shock from which it was by no means so easy to recover. The sense that it was so, was brought all the more powerfully home to him when he began to disapparel himself for the purpose of seeking his couch; and then he suddenly stamped his foot with rage as he felt that he was afraid to go to bed! He walked to and fro—he sat down and took a book—he rose up again—his restlessness was increasing.

“But how could he have got there?” the Duke suddenly asked himself. “The door of the conservatory was locked—and no one could have entered the library or the billiard-room unperceived by at least some of the domestics. Ah!” ejaculated the Duke within himself; “if he were really there, then he must be there now! Egress was impossible!”

As this idea struck the Duke of Marchmont, a devilish notion at the same time flashed to his brain. He nerved himself with all his energy to carry it out; he forced upon himself the thought of how much depended upon it; his features grew rigid with desperate resoluteness—and he determined to do that which had just entered his head. Resuming the apparel which he had cast off, the Duke secured the pistol about his person; and taking a light, issued from his chamber.

He descended the staircase, and first of all entered the billiard-room. With the taper in one hand, and the other ready prepared to seize upon a pistol, the Duke searched the place—but found no one. He passed into the library: an equally rigid search was instituted there—and still no one. Thence he

passed out into the conservatory say to himself, “Perhaps if I had on searched this place well at the time, might have found him crouched behind one of the trees or in some dark nook.”

It was no longer with the slightest scintillation of cowardice, but with stern, dogged, savage resoluteness, purpose, that the Duke of Marchmont pursued his investigation here—but a to no effect. He examined the out door—and it was fast locked, as when Wilson Stanhope had himself examined it.

“Can he be still in the house?” asked the Duke of himself: “or was it after all naught but an illusion?—for worse still, was it—was it a spirit from the other world?”

Now all in an instant his resoluteness melted away—a cold shudder ran through him—his looks were swept in recoiling terror around; and he felt as if the least indication of anything supernatural would crush and overpower him in a moment. A multitude of horrible fancies swept through his brain: his countenance was ghastly white; and he felt his heart beating with so painful a violence that it appeared as if he had just been abruptly awakened out of a hideous dream.

“Fool, fool that I am!” he said to himself: “at one instant bold & desperation!—at another the veriest coward that walks the face of the earth. Perhaps after all he is secreted elsewhere in the house: for how, on the other occasion, could he have procured admittance within those walls. By heaven, I will not rest till I have searched the place throughout!”

Again was the fortitude of the Duke of Marchmont returning; and he was about to issue from the conservatory to return into the library and thence regain the other part of the mansion,—when all of a sudden it struck him that he beheld a human countenance looking in at him through the glass. The taper nearly fell from his hand; the next instant the face was gone—but his ear distinctly caught the sound of rapidly retreating footsteps. Thus satisfied that it was indeed a living being, but having no particular idea of the appearance of that countenance which he had seen looking in upon him, the Duke hastened from the conservatory—sped through the library—and in a few moments reached the private door.

which was so frequently mentioned in earlier chapters of this narrative. Of this door he always had the key: he opened it—and leaving the taper in a recess, he rushed forth.

"Now, by heaven! if it is *he*," the Duke thought within his own breast—and he found himself nerved with an extraordinary strength of mind, or rather we should say, a satanic resoluteness of purpose,—“if it is *he*, death—death!”

He stopped and listened: the sounds of footsteps reached his ear from a particular direction: and thither he sped with a swiftness that amazed himself. He could however see nothing—for there was a thick fog: but he knew every inch of his own grounds well, and could thus keep to the gravel-walk even though rushing on at so fleet a pace. The retreating footsteps became more distinct. Marchmont then knew that he was in the vicinity of a grass-plot: and by transferring his route to the soft yielding turf the sounds of his own steps were no longer audible.

All of a sudden the footsteps of the other ceased; then in a few minutes, they appeared to be coming hastily towards him: and the Duke stood still. Nearer came those steps; then they suddenly ceased again, as if the individual was stopping short to listen; and then they came on once more. The Duke of Marchmont had a pistol in each hand: and he was resolved to fire the very moment he should obtain the certainty that it was he whom he sought—he whom he feared—he whose life he had made up his mind to take! Nearer came the footsteps: they were advancing more slowly along the gravel-walk: they were heavy steps, as if they were clumsy shoes or coarse boots that were thus treading,—and Marchmont thought within himself, “It cannot after all be *he*!”

A few moments put an end to the Duke's uncertainty: for a figure was revealed to him through the mist: and he himself was simultaneously revealed to that individual.

“Hands off, whoever you are!” growled a ferocious voice: “or I'll dash your brains out—blow me if I don't!”

“Move not another inch,” said the Duke, with stern intrepidity: “or I send a bullet through your brains!”

“I'm only a poor feller,” responded the intruder, “which has lost his way

in this cursed fog: and I didn't go for to do no harm.”

“If that be the case,” answered the Duke, “I will do you no harm either. But tell me—how came you to look into that conservatory just now?”

“Ah, well I see you're the same gentleman which was in that place: but I wasn't after no ill. I saw the light—or should rather say, I come right bang agin the place in the midst of the fog, and should have gone smash through it glass and all, if so be that it wasn't for that there glim as you carried in your hand.”

During this brief colloquy, the Duke of Marchmont had leisure to contemplate the intruder more narrowly as his eyes grew accustomed to the obscurity which prevailed. A suspicion arose in his mind; and another instant's scrutiny of that villanous hangdog countenance confirmed it. He now knew beyond any farther doubt who this man was; and it appeared to him as if he were suddenly thrown in his way in order to become an instrument in the carrying out of his designs.

“My poor fellow,” he said, assuming the most compassionate voice; “you are evidently a houseless wanderer: and so far from blaming you for having involuntarily intruded on my grounds pity you. What can I do for you? you require food? and shall I a left over the stable where rest yourself for the night afraid: I am the Duke of M and I flatter myself that no has ever had any manner of harshness or o

“I'm werr-

lordship,”

“and if so b

at this time o night for a most o wipers I should be uncommon thankful.”

“Come with me, my poor man,” replied the Duke, in the same compassionate voice as before; “and I will see what I can do for you. This way.”

Marchmont acted as if he had not the slightest suspicion of the fellow's true character; and in this manner he conducted him towards the private door of the house. While proceeding thither, the ill-looking intruder eyed the nobleman askance, in order to penetrate his purpose and assure himself that he was really safe: but he saw nothing on the part of the Duke to make him apprehend any treachery. His circumstances

were desperate; for though he had money in his pocket, yet he was well nigh famished, from the simple fact that he had not dared approach any habitation during the day, much less enter any village or hamlet, in order to purchase food. He accordingly resolved to accept the proffered kindness of the Duke: for he felt tolerably well convinced that he incurred no peril in so doing.

Marchmont conducted him over the threshold of the private door, which he immediately locked; and taking the taper from the recess, he led the way towards the servants' offices,—the ill-looking man following. Proceeding to the larder, the Duke said, "Take whatever you fancy; be not afraid—I do not things by halves."

The man lifted down a cold joint; another shelf supplied bread and cheese; and the Duke bade him bring the food into the servants' hall. Then his Grace showed him where to draw a jug of strong ale, and bade him sit down and eat. The man most readily and joyously obeyed: he placed himself at the table, and commenced a mighty inroad on the sirloin,—prefacing it however with a deep draught of the old October ale. The Duke sat down at a little distance: and without appearing to look towards his strange guest, was nevertheless contemplating him furtively the whole time.

"It's werry kind, my lord," said the man, "for a great nobleman like yourself to take such compassion on a poor hard-working feller which has had no work to do for the last month——"

"Eat and drink," interrupted Marchmont; "and give me your thanks afterwards. Do not be afraid of making inroads on the provisions; there is more ale in the cask."

Thus encouraged, the ill-looking guest renewed his assault on the sirloin, and paid his respects to the ale. He ate with the voracity of one who had been foodless for many, many long hours—as was indeed the case. At length he laid down his knife and fork, and drained the jug.

"Now," said the Duke, "replenish that jug—for I must have some little discourse with you. I have already given you the assurance that I do not things by halves; and I must see if I can be of service to you for the future."

The man lost no time in refilling the jug from the barrel of old October; and returning to his seat, he nodded with a sort of respectful familiarity to the Duke, saying, "Here'n wishing your Grace all 'ealth and 'appiness, and many years to enjoy them good things which you bestows on a poor honest Christian like myself."

The Duke made no response; but rising from his seat, shut the door of the servants' hall; and then returning to his chair, he said, "We must now have a few minutes' discourse."

There was something in the Duke of Marchmont's appearance—something which seemed altered in his manner, that the ill-looking guest did not altogether like. He looked around him—fidgeted on his chair for a moment—appeared inclined to take up his club, which lay near his battered hat at his feet—then flung a furtive glance at the Duke again—and then had recourse to the ale jug, as if thence to derive for itude and encouragement. When he deposited it on the table again, he perceived that the Duke was regarding him in a peculiar manner.

"Do not be afraid," said Marchmont; "and do not start nor grow excited—much less attempt any violence—I mean you no harm—but in a word, I know who you are!"

The fellow *did* start despite the injunction to the contrary; and again he made a motion as if to snatch up his club; but the Duke, instantaneously displaying a pistol, said "Look: you are at my mercy. But be quiet—I tell you again that I will do you no harm. In a word, you can serve me."

"Ah! that's different," exclaimed the fellow "I always like to hear that my services is needed—cos why, it shows that everything is square and above board."

"Yes—I know you," continued the Duke: "I recognised you within few instants after our encounter; and therefore you may judge whether I mean you a mischief, considering the way in which I have treated you. Your name is Barnes—and you are known as the Barker."

Well, my lord, I don't deny them's my names, titles, and distinctions! and if so be they ain't quite so high and mighty as your own, they're all werry well in their own way. I come of a werry respectable family, my lord:

most of my ancestors was great public characters, and went out of the world before the public gaze amidst worthy applause. I'm rather proud on 'em, though I say it which shouldn't say it."

"Now that you have done this long tirade," said the Duke of Marchmont, "perhaps you will listen to me."

"But first of all, my lord," interrupted the Barker, "perhaps you will have the goodness to tell me how it was you recognised me. I know that I'm a gentleman of much renown, and that people in certain quarters make themselves uncommon busy in looking after me and prying into my concerns."

"A few words of explanation will suffice," responded the Duke, cutting short that garrulity which received its inspiration from the strength of the October ale. "There have been accurate personal descriptions given of you in newspaper advertisements, placards, and handbills——"

"Ah! my lord, see what popularity is!" said the Barker: and he again had recourse to the ale jug.

We may here pause for an instant to explain that the Duke of Marchmont had at the time, for reasons known to the reader, taken a great interest in the trial of Lettice Rodney: he had therefore closely watched the newspapers in order to see whether anything transpired relative to Madame Angelique's establishment, or showed that there had been a connexion in any sort of way between Lettice Rodney and himself. Thus was it that the Duke had been led to read the personal description that was given of the Barker, when the result of the trial proved that he, Mrs. Webber, and another were the actual murderers of the Liverpool lawyer. The Duke had since thought more than once that Barney the Barker was an instrument for whom he could find employment; and thus was it that the personal description of the ruffian had remained so faithfully impressed upon his memory. Infinitely disgusted was his Grace now with the coarse flippant familiarity which the Barker displayed under the influence of the ale: for refined villany loathes vulgar villany although there may be no shade of difference between the actual criminality of either, and although the former may condescend or feel itself necessitated to make use of the latter. But

Marchmont did not choose to assume an overbearing manner, nor to betray his disgust too visibly to the ruffian whose services he was now resolved to put into requisition.

"I can well understand," he said "how it is that you are a houseless wanderer and that your condition is so deplorable. There is a reward set upon your head: and your predicament is more than ever perilous after your most recent exploits with the police officers at the house some where in the southern side of London. Now, if I were to afford you the means of disguise and to give you money—if I were also to hold out to you a prospect of a much larger sum, so that you might escape out of the country and go to America or France, or go out to Australia—anything in short——"

"Your lordship may command me in every way," exclaimed the Barker, his hideous hang-dog countenance testifying the utmost joy. "There's nothing I'd stick at to serve so kind a friend as your Grace offers to prove toward me."

"Well and fairly spoken," rejoined the Duke. "I do indeed require a most signal service at your hands; and if you fulfil it, all that I have promised shall be done."

We will not dwell any longer upon the conversation that took place between the Duke of Marchmont and his miscreant companion: suffice it to say that the latter fully comprehended the dark iniquitous business that was entrusted to him, and swore to accomplish it. The Duke ascended to his chamber, and there procured a small phial containing a dye for the complexion, a black wax with frizzy curls, and a false moustache,—these articles having been required by his Grace for some masquerading purposes several years back, and having since remained forgotten until now in some nook of his wardrobe. He then took from a cupboard a discoloured suit of apparel, which by accident had not yet passed as "perquisite" into the hands of his valet; and descending with those things, the Duke of Marchmont rejoined the Barker whom he had left in the servants' hall. The ruffian speedily metamorphosed himself according to the instructions he received and the means placed at his disposal, and of which he availed himself with infinite satisfaction and delight. By the aid

of a looking glass he dyed his complexion with a portion of the liquid furnished by the phial; and the Duke informed him how, by the purchase of a few simple things at a chemist's to form a similar decoction for future use. The appendage of the moustache concealed that peculiar formation of the Barker's upper lip which rendered him so easily recognisable; and the garments which the Duke supplied him, as well as the wig, aided in the accomplishment of the disguise. From amidst the quantity of boots and shoes which the male domestics of the establishment had left down-stairs to be cleaned by the underlings in the morning, Marchmont bade the Barker choose a pair that would fit him; and he did the same in respect to the hats that were suspended in the servants' hall. The Duke then placed a sum of money in the villain's hand—and bade him from a bundle of his own cast-off clothes, so that he might sink it in the first pond or stream he should reach.

All these matters being settled, the transmogrified Mr. Barnes took his departure from Oaklands; and the Duke of Marchmont returned to his own chamber.

"It was Satan's self," he thought within his own mind, "who threw this fellow in my way to-night! I can now dispense with the services of Stanhope,—which, after all, is an advantage: for he is more squeamish than I had fancied—whereas on the other hand this ruffian will do my business without compunction and without remorse. Her fate will soon be sealed; and now I have only to think what is to be done with regard to him—if indeed it be he himself in the living person, and not a spirit whom I have seen!"

CHAPTER XCVIII.

THE SAINT.

THE scene again shifts to London. In a well-furnished room at a beautiful little suburban villa, Mr. White Choker was seated upon a sofa with the mistress whom Madame Angelique had so kindly provided for him. This was Linda, the German beauty. She was dressed in an elegant *deshabille*, consisting of a French muslin wrapper; and which,

though it came up to the throat, never theless defined all the voluptuous proportions of her form. The rich masses of her auburn hair enframed her countenance with heavy bands, and were negligently knotted behind the well shaped head; for it was not yet mid-day and Linda's toilet had still to be accomplished.

Mr. White Choker was deeply enamoured of his beautiful mistress. Several days had now passed since he first became possessed of her: he firmly believed that she was *all but* virtuous when she came to his arms; and he was very far from suspecting that she was in the way to become a mother. On the occasion when we now find him seated by her side, he had only just arrived at the villa, where he had not passed the preceding night: for he could not too often adopt towards the wife of his bosom, the excellent Mrs. White Choker, the excuse "that he was going to keep a vigil of blessed prayer by the bedside of a dear brother in the good work, who was lying at that extremity which was but the passport to the realms of eternal bliss.

Mr. White Choker was dressed in precisely the same style as when we first introduced him to the reader,—a black suit—a neckcloth, displaying no collar-shoes and stockings, the former with very large bows,—while a capacious cotton umbrella kept company with his low-crowned hat which he had deposited on the carpet. How is it that all "saints" carry cotton umbrellas? A "saint" evidently does not consider himself perfect without such an appendage. How ever rich he may be, you will never see him with a silk umbrella: it is always a cotton one. If you peep into Exeter Hall, a glance will soon satisfy you that all the umbrellas which tap upon the floor at some peculiarly refreshing portion of the speaker's discourse, are stout cotton ones, and there shall not be a single silk one amongst them. A cotton umbrella is as inseparable from a gentleman "saint" as a brandy flask is from a lady "saint;" and perhaps there is an equal number of both umbrellas and flasks at every meeting at Exeter Hall or any other resort of the sanctimonious.

But to return to our narrative. Mr. White Choker sat upon the sofa next to Linda; and having toyed for some little while with her, he began to notice that the expression of her countenance was pensive even to mournfulness.

"Tell me, my dear girl," he said, in that whining cating tone which from long habit he now invariably adopted, so that even his professions of love were conveyed in an Exeter Hall snivel—"tell me, my dear girl, what oppresses your mind? If you have secrets woe let your loving friend Choker: share them; for when you smile, Choker shall smile—and when you weep likewise."

Two pearly tears were now trickling down Linda's cheeks; and Mr. White Choker perceiving the same, thought it expedient to kiss them away in the first instance, and then to get up a little sympathetic snivel of his own in the second instance. In so doing, he pulled out his white kerchief; and, behold! a bundle of Tracts fell upon the floor. They were the newly published effusions of one of the most lavary vessels and most influential members of the Foreign Cannibal Reclaiming, Negro Christianising, and Naked Savage-Clothing Society; and on receiving them that very morning, Mr. White Choker had assured his rustling and pious wife that he would asten off to distribute them amongst the "benighted;" but instead of doing anything of the sort, he had sped, as we have seen, to the villa which he had hired for his mistress.

"But tell me, my dearest Linda," said Mr. White Choker, when he fancied he had gone through a sufficient process of snivelling, and turning up the whites of his eyes, and sighing and groaning, "tell me, my love what it is that ails you? If you have any remorse for the life you are leading, set your mind at ease; for the good that I do in the world more than compensates for any little indiscretion or weakness of which I may be guilty; and the cloak of my sanctity covereth thee also my dear sister—But hang it! I am not on the platform now! I really thought I was for the moment. Come, Linda dear, tell your own faithful Choker what it is that afflicts you; and he will do everything that lies in his power to contribute to your happiness."

O—12

"How can I ever tell you the truth?" said Linda, sobbing and weeping—"you who are so kind and good to me!"

"You speak, my love as if you had deceived me in some way or another," said the sanctimonious gentleman; and his countenance grew considerably elongated. "Pray be candid: let me know the worst, whatever it is—yea let me know the worst."

"It is true" continued Linda, now wringing her hands, "that in one sense you have been deceived—I mean that something has been kept back—"

"What? what?" asked Mr. White Choker, sidestepping very uneasily upon his seat. Madame Angelique told me you had only been once astray—"

"Ah! it was not in this that you were deceived my dear friend," replied the weeping Linda: "for that was true enough. Oh! I never can tell you!"

"But you must, my dear—you must let me know the entire truth," said Mr. White Choker. "I can't conceive what you mean—I can't understand what it is you have got to tell. But pray be candid. You don't know what a fidget this uncertainty keeps me in: I am all over with a tremble. You don't think Snuffenoso suspect—"

"No nothing of that sort," responded Linda. "It is not any of your acquaintances—"

"Then some of your own?" hastily suggested Mr. White Choker. "Oh! my dear, how could you have been so indiscreet? Don't you know that I am a blessed saint, and that if the odour of my sanctity once became tainted by the breath of scandal—Oh dear me! dear me! what would they say of me at Exeter Hall?"

"I am very, very unhappy," sobbed Linda, who appeared as if her heart would break; "and I wish I had never accepted your protection—for I am afraid—"

"Afraid of what?" asked the saint, still in a feverish excitement.

"That if my husband were only to discover—"

"Your husband?"—and Mr. White Choker suddenly put on such a look of blank despair that his appearance was perfectly ludicrous.

Seized with consternation, overcome with dismay, and plotting to himself actions for *crim con.* and all sorts of evils, the unfortunate gentleman rolled off the sofa and tumbled over his stout

cotton umbrella and his broad-brimmed hat. Then, as he afterwards expressed himself, he groaned in spirit: and wished that he had rather become the companion of Esquimaux and white bears of the North Pole, or of benighted cannibals in the islands of the South Pacific, than have remained in the more salubrious and civilized region of his birth to have fallen in with a married woman. Linda besought the saint to pick himself up: but as he exhibited no inclination to do anything of the sort, but only lay sprawling and groaning on the floor, with his head crushing his hat and his nose rubbing against his cotton umbrella, the considerate young lady thought she had better try her own hand at picking him up. The saint suffered himself to be overpersuaded; and pressing Linda in his arms, he covered her with kisses,—groaning and whining most fearfully for no less a period than five minutes.

"And now tell me," he said, in a voice as if it were a schoolboy whimpering over a task that he could not work out,—“tell me all about this, my dear. How came you to be married? where is your husband? who is he? Is he a godly man? hath he the fear of the Lord before his eyes? But d—n him, whoever he is!”—and Mr. White Choker gave utterance to this ejaculation with an unctious and emphasis which proved the sincerity with which this most unsaint-like malediction was expressed.

"If you will listen to me," said Linda, who still continued to sob and weep somewhat, "I will tell you all about it. You know I am a native of Germany. My father and mother were genteel people, living at Mannheim; and about three years ago an English gentleman was stopping at the hotel exactly facing our residence. He became acquainted with us, and visited us frequently. He was very rich—a Captain in a Hussar regiment—"

Linda started as if a voice from the dead had suddenly spoken in her ear: for Mr. White Choker gave a groan so deep and hollow that it was really no wonder the young lady was thus terrified. A captain of Hussars! Good heavens, that his malignant planets should have possibly opened the way to throw him in contact with such a vessel of wrath, as the saint considered

every military officer to be! A captain of Hussars. Why, he would sooner face all the Snufflenoses in the world—he would sooner have a committee of inquiry appointed by his Society to investigate his character, with the certainty that such committee should consist of all his sworn enemies—than stand the chance of facing a captain of Hussars. He would sooner be scourged thrice round Hyde Park than encounter such an individual! In a word, an hour in the pillory, and being pelted the while with rotten eggs, were a pleasant little pastime in comparison with the risk of being called to an account by a captain of Hussars!

"Pray, my dearest friend, do not make yourself so miserable," said Linda, plying all her little artifices and wiles, all her wheedlings and coaxings, and all her cajoleries to appease him somewhat. "I am very sorry—I was going to have told you the whole truth—but the instant I saw you, I conceived such an affection for you that I was afraid if you heard I was married—"

"Ah, well-a-day! the mischief is done my dear," groaned Mr. White Choker, "Love is the forbidden fruit—and you are the Eve that tempted this wretched Adam"—and he slapped his breast—"to fall."

"Let me continue my narrative," said Linda, with one arm thrown round his neck. "This Captain—pray don't groan so—this Captain of Hussars—What? another groan?—Well, I must call him, then, by the name of Cartwright. Though many years older than myself, he sought me as his bride. I did not love him: I hated him from the very instant that I perceived his attentions began to grow marked. On the other hand my parents encouraged his addresses: he boasted of his wealth—he lived in good style—and they thought that such an alliance would be ensuring an excellent position for their daughter. It is the old tale: the child was sacrificed to the wishes of the parents—and I became the bride of the Hussar Captain—I mean of Cartwright," Linda hastily added; for another sepulchral groan came up from the cavern-like depths of Mr. White Choker's throat.

She paused for a few minutes, during which she seemed to be sobbing bitterly; while the saint rocked himself to and

fro, groaning each time he went backward, and whining each time he went forward: so that what with the alternations of the groan and the whine he made as sweet a music as ever emanated from the human throat.

"Three years have elapsed since that fatal marriage," proceeded Linda, in a low and mournful voice: "but only for one year did I live with that man. He treated me cruelly—he beat me—Oh! you have no idea of his dreadful violence—the infuriate gusts of passion——"

Another terrific groan escaped from Mr. White Choker's lips: his countenance was ghastly—he quivered and shivered in every limb. Visions of horse-whips and horse-pistols, of writs for *crim. con.*, of tribunals filled with big-wigs, of heavy damages, of columns of scandal in the newspapers, of Exeter Hall consternation, of select committees of inquiry, whirled around him as if Pandora's box had just been opened under his very nose and all the evils it contained were about to settle upon him like the plague of locusts. And amidst them all was the hideous countenance of Snuffnose, his great rival and arch-enemy in the sphere of saintdom, grinning maliciously at him. Unhappy Mr. White Choker! what was he to do?

"Yes," continued Linda, "at the expiration of a year I was compelled to leave that dreadful man—and I returned to my parents. He followed me—he told them such tales that they would not believe otherwise than that I myself was in fault, and that he himself was an angel of goodness, kindness, and virtue. They insisted that I should return to him; and in order to avoid such a dreadful fate, I fled from home, I came to England, and obtained a situation as governess in a highly respectable family: but my husband found me out and I was compelled to fly once more. I went to Paris, where I obtained another situation; and it was during one of Madame Angelique's temporary visits to the French capital that I happened to fall in with her. I believed her to be a highly respectable lady; and she begged me if ever I returned to London, to favour her with a call. I promised that I would. My husband came to Paris; I heard persons speaking of him—I learnt that he was ruined—that he was leading a terribly wild life: I hoped therefore that caring no longer for me, he might desist

from his persecutions. But no such thing. He found me out—he insisted upon my returning to him—and again was I compelled to fly."

"And what did you do then, my poor dear Linda?" asked Mr. White Choker, with another deep lugubrious groan.

"Believing that my husband's debts rendered it unlikely that he would revisit England, I sped back to London, where I soon obtained another situation as governess. But my evil genius haunted me. A few weeks ago my husband re-appeared; and again was I compelled to flee from a happy home. I was reduced to despair; and in an evil hour I encountered Madame Angelique. She invited me to her house—I went—its true character soon became known to me—she introduced a gentleman—and—and—from necessity I fell. I saw no one else until I came under your protection."

"And that one gentleman," said Mr. White Choker, shaking his head solemnly: "who is he? Some dashing young spark——"

"No—an elderly gentleman," responded Linda: "and I did hear it whispered that he was some high dignitary of the Church."

"Ah! then, my dear, there was no harm—no harm at all," said Mr. White Choker. "The sanctity of an individual glosses over any little failing. But about this terrible husband of yours—Dear me! dear me! if I had known all this——"

"Ah! it is the idea of that husband of mine which makes me wretched!" moaned Linda.

"And you are almost sure that he will find you out—are you not my dear girl?" inquired Mr. White Choker, quivering from head to foot.

"Let us hope not," responded Linda, suffering her countenance to assume a more cheerful aspect. "You will not desert me on that account—Oh! tell me that you will not desert me!"

But scarcely were the words spoken, when a terrific knock at the front door thundered through the house—the bell at the same time rang as frantically as if pulled by a lunatic just escaped out of Bedlam—and Mr. White Choker felt as if he were shrivelling up into nothing. But the next instant a thought struck this saint-like man: the instinct of self-preservation asserted

if she dared not so much as even steal a furtive glance at her husband, nor put forth a single syllable in appeal for his mercy. But a sudden idea struck Mr. White Choker: his only resource was to ride it with a high hand; and though it required a very desperate effort to screw up his courage to such a point, yet the circumstances of the case enabled him to do so. It was a sort of neck-or-nothing crisis—one of those emergencies which give energy to the veriest coward.

Rising up from his seat, he advanced a pace or two towards the ferocious Captain—but taking good care to pick up his cotton umbrella, so as to be in readiness to resist any sudden attack; and assuming a look sanctimoniously firm and deprecatingly virtuous, he said, "The character of good and well-meaning man is not to be aspersed in this style. Peradventure I did verily go to the abode of the woman whom you call Madame Angelique; but it was for the blessed purpose of reclaiming those sheep which had strayed from the fold——"

"And so you take one of the sheep," vociferated the Captain, "and put her into a handsomely furnished villa?"

"Yea, verily—to reclaim her," responded Mr. White Choker, now speaking with a degree of assurance that astonished himself. "My visits hither have had the most godly purpose. It has been to reason with her on the past—to preach savoury homilies unto her—to infuse refreshing doctrines into her soul——"

"And these precious homilies of your's are so long," retorted the Captain, with a ferocious sneer, "that you have to pass the whole night with her at times—eh?"

"Prove it—I defy you to prove it!" ejaculated Mr. White Choker, his assurance heightening into effrontery through the very desperation of his position; and he moreover flattered himself that he could place implicit reliance on the fidelity of the servants belonging to the villa.

"Now look you, Mr. Saint, or whatever you are," exclaimed the Captain, "it is all very well for you to assume an air of innocence; but you are safe caught in a trap. I know everything. You won't have a leg to stand upon if you go into a court of justice; and you'll have Mrs. White Choker and all

the little Chokers pointing their indignant fingers at a bad husband and a worthless father."

"We shall see," said the saint gruffly. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself to go on in this manner before your virtuous wife. Speak to her, sir—she will tell you of what holy and blessed nature our intercourse has been, so that not even have we gone as far as to exchange the chaste kiss of peace."

"Linda," said Captain Cartwright, now speaking in a tone of mournful reproach, "you imagine that you have had wrongs to complain of at my hands. But my fault has been in loving you all too well——"

"Oh, do not speak to me! I cannot endure it!" cried the weeping Linda. "I feel—oh! I feel that I have wronged you much—that I have exaggerated your little ebullitions of temper——"

"Confess that you have dishonoured me!" said the Captain: "throw yourself upon your knees at my feet and reveal everything. It will be some atonement——"

"Linda my love—Mrs. Cartwright, I mean—dear sister in the blessed cause I would say," stammered out Mr. White Choker, now affrighted, wretched and discomfited once again, "you would not betray me—I mean—I mean, you would not say anything against me—or tell me an untruth——"

"Linda," broke in Captain Cartwright, "I command you to speak with frankness! On what terms are you living with this man? Are you not his mistress?"

"Oh, I must tell the truth!—this is dreadful!" shrieked forth Linda: "but I must tell the truth!"—then falling on her knees at Captain Cartwright's feet, she said, "Yea—it is so—Alas! that I must confess it! But deal mercifully with him—he has treated me well——"

"Enough," said the Captain, giving a terrific twirl to his moustache. "Rise, Linda, and compose yourself. You at least have made by this confession all the atonement that was in your power; and though henceforth everything is at an end between us——"

Captain Cartwright stopped short; and turning abruptly round, seemed to be wiping away his tears with a scented cambric handkerchief. Linda rose from her knees; and ~~not daring to~~ throw a single glance upon Mr. White

Choker, she sank on a chair apparently convulsed with grief. As for the saint himself, he stood the very picture of wretchedness and misery; but yet there was something ludicrous in the expression of his woe-begone countenance.

"Sir," said Captain Cartwright, advancing towards him, "what reparation can you make me for having torn an angel from my arms?"

"My good friend—my very dear friend," faltered the saint, "I—I don't think you could have missed the angel very much—seeing that she has long been absent from your arms——"

"She would have come back, sir—and I should have received her were she not thus polluted! But enough of this trifling," ejaculated the Captain, with a fierce sternness. "Will you dare deny any longer that this lady—my wife—is your mistress? Come, sir, speak out, or by heaven——"

"Pray, pray don't use any violence," implored the wretched Mr. White Choker. "I—I confess that appearances are against me; but—but—for the sake of my family, whom I have brought up as savoury vessels, having the fear of the Lord before their eyes——"

"Sir, I myself am a Christian," interrupted Captain Cartwright, "and I can forgive so far as forgiveness be possible. But you must confess sir——"

"Well, well, I confess—and—and—if five hundred or a thousand pounds—will—will—hush up this little matter—and make all things pleasant——"

At that moment footsteps were heard coming from the landing: an individual, with an air of jaunty self-sufficiency, and very gaily dressed, made his appearance, the door having continued ajar the whole time. Mr. White Choker was now perfectly aghast: for the conviction smote

that a witness had overheard something that had taken place; and might have been knocked down or straw when Captain Cartwright said, "This, sir, is Mr. Downy, a member of the legal firm of which I have spoken."

Mr. Downy closed the door; and seating himself at the table, drew forth a bundle of papers, tied round with red tape, and of that ominous length, fold, and general appearance, which seemed to indicate that all the moral tortures

of the law might be wielded at the discretion of this gentleman.

"A very painful business, Mr. Choker—a very painful business," said Downy. "Sorry to be compelled to serve process on a pious gentleman like yourself. But it can't be helped. Saints will be sinners, you know—hah!—they must take the consequences. Let me see," continued the legal gentleman, as he proceeded to fill up a long slip of parchment and then arranged a corresponding slip of ordinary paper to be likewise filled up. "Here the original—and here's the copy. Damages five thousand—eh, Captain!"

"Not a farthing less, sir!" responded Cartwright fiercely, as if he were offended that there could even be a doubt as to the price that he put upon the angel he had lost.

"Very good, Captain," said Mr. Downy: "damages five thousand. You here, Mr. Choker? I keep the original; where shall I serve the copy? Will you take it? or will you refer me to your solicitors? or shall I just leave it at your own house as I pass by the door presently? It will be no trouble; I will give it into Mr. Choker's own hands—and none of the servants will know anything about it. The trial will come on in November—Court of Common Pleas. Ah! it will be a rare excitement, as sure as my name is honest Iko—I mean Downy."

The reader may conceive the awful state of mind into which Mr. White Choker was thrown by these terrible proceedings. Five thousand pound damages—a writ ready drawn out—and the whole affair certain to obtain a fearful publicity in the course of the day! The miserable saint looked at Mr. Downy, but beheld not the least encouragement in the insolently looming expression of his countenance. He looked at the Captain: but this gallant officer of Hussars was twirling his fierce moustache with the sternest resoluteness of purpose. He looked towards Linda; but that fallen angel whose departed virtue was appraised at five thousand pounds, was still covering her features with her hand and sobbing convulsively. Mr. White Choker turned up his eyes to the ceiling and gave vent to a hollow groan. Mr. Downy, approaching him with an air of jaunty familiarity, held the ominous copy of the writ between his finger and

thumb; and as if suddenly recollecting something, he said, "By the bye, there will be one witness we shall want—and perhaps, Mr. Choker, you would have no objection to give me his address—I mean Mr. Snufflenose."

This was the crowning stone of the entire fabric of Mr. White Choker's misery. Snufflenose of all persons, as a witness against him! He was now desperate, clutching Mr. Downy by the lapel of his coat, he dragged him aside,—hastily whispering with nervous agitation, "For heaven's sake get this settled! Pray save me from exposure—I could not survive it. It would be my death! Only conceive, a man in my position to be dragged before a tribunal! Talk to the Captain—offer him a sum—implore him to be reasonable—"

"Look you here, Mr. Choker," said Mr. Downy, drawing the saint into a window-recess: "I am not a harsh man—and our firm is above pressing on a case for mere paltry costs. You will do well to settle it; for it is a terrible black affair—beats 'Higgins *versus* Wiggins' all to smashes, and 'Biggins *versus* Sniggins' all to shivers. Come, you're pretty warm—hal hal hal—warm in two ways," chuckled Mr. Downy, who seemed of a jocular disposition; "warm in love and warm in purse. Now then, what shall we say? Three thousand?"

"Three Thousand?" groaned Mr. White Choker with a countenance uncommonly blank. "It's a very large sum—"

"Yes; but the injury inflicted is very large also," responded Mr. Downy. "Take my advice—it's only six and eightpence you know;"—and here the facetious gentleman chuckled again. "Don't haggle at a few pounds. To settle it for three thousand, and a fifty pound note for my costs, will be dirt cheap. In fact, between you and me and the post," added Mr. Downy, in a mysteriously confidential whisper, "the Captain will be a cursed fool if he settles it at all. He's got a capital case—a capital case. Why, sir, it beats cock-fighting."

Mr. Downy evidently thought that his last argument was a smasher, and poor Mr. White Choker was too miserably bewildered to discern any incongruity in the metaphor. He pleaded hard for Mr. Downy to reduce the demand to a couple of thousand; but the legal gentleman was obstinate. At

length he said, "Well, I must see what I can do. I have a great respect for a pious man like yourself; and I shouldn't like to see you driven out of society, and poor Mrs. White Choker drowning herself in the *Serpentine*, leaving all the little Chokers to misery and wretchedness. No, no—that isn't the way business is done by honest Ike Shad—Mr. Downy I mean, of the eminent firm of Catchflat, Sharply, Rumrig, and Co."

With these words the pseudo-lawyer—whom our readers have had no difficulty in recognising as an old acquaintance—accompanied Captain Cartwright, and drew him aside. Mr. White Choker kept groaning inwardly, as he watched them with most anxious suspense. For several minutes Mr. Downy appeared to be pleading very energetically on the saint's behalf, so far as could be judged from his gesticulations: while the Captain seemed to be listening with a stern and dogged resoluteness. At length this gallant gentleman, as if growing impatient, exclaimed vehemently, "No, not one farthing less! Serve the writ, Mr. Downy."

"No, no!" cried the wretched saint imploringly: "let us settle it at once—anyhow!"

"It's the best thing you can do, my dear Sir," hastily whispered Mr. Downy, as he again accompanied the unfortunate Mr. White Choker. "Sit down and draw the cheque—three thousand and fifty guineas."

"Pounds," said the miserable victim.

"Guineas!" rejoined Mr. Downy emphatically. "The Captain will only treat with guineas as a basis: that is his ultimatum."

Mr. White Choker gave another deep groan, it being about the six hundredth that had come up from his cavern-like throat on the memorable day; but resigning himself to his fate, he sat down and drew up the cheque according to dictation.

"And now," said Mr. Downy, "we will pitch these things into the grate;"—and he tore up the writs, both original and copy into infinitesimal pieces, for fear lest they should be collected in order to form the groundwork of a persecution for conspiracy to extort money under false pretences.

Having written the cheque, Mr. White Choker's mind became relieved

of a considerable load: and he looked towards the chair which Linda had occupied a few moments back. But she was gone: she had flitted from the room.

"And now good morning to you, Sir," said Captain Cartwright. "For your own sake you will keep this business as secret as possible."

"Good bye, old fellow," said Mr. Downy, with a singular leer upon his countenance. "You behaved uncommon well after all; and you'll bless the moment you listened to the advice of honest Ike Shadbolt."

The Captain and his acolyte passed out of the room, closing the door behind them. For a few instants Mr. White Choker sat bewildered. A suspicion had flashed to his mind: its growth was marvellously rapid: it amounted to a certainty—he saw that he was done. He started up to his feet; he stood for an instant—and then he rushed to the door. Just as he opened it, he heard a sort of titter or giggle in a female voice of his Linda! She was descending the stairs with the two men. Mr. Choker was on the very point of shouting out "Stop, thieves!" when it struck him that he would be thereby provoking the very scandal and exposure which he had paid so heavily to avoid. He dashed his hand against his forehead, and gave vent to a curse bitter enough to electrify ten thousand Exeter Hall audiences if there had been so many and if they had happened to hear it. He rushed to the window: and lo! he beheld Captain Cartwright gallantly handling Linda into a cab,—both of them evidently in the highest possible spirits. As for Mr. Downy—or honest Ike Shadbolt, as he had proclaimed himself to be—he was almost convulsed with laughter; and looking up towards the window, he waved his hand with the most impudent familiarity at Mr. White Choker. The cab drove off at a rattling pace; and we need hardly inform the reader that its first destination was the establishment of the saint's bankers in order to get the cheque cashed.

Mr. Choker, on beholding the vehicle thus disappear, rushed up stairs to Linda's chamber; and a glance at its condition showed him that she had carried off all the jewels and valuables

which he had presented to her. A similar research in the dining-room made the saint painfully aware that the handsome service of plate he had bought for her use had likewise disappeared. He threw himself on a sofa—buried his head in the cushions—moaned and groaned—sweated and snivelled—whined and whimpered—and wished himself at the hottest place he could think of and in the society of a personage whose name must not be mentioned to polite ears.

But the cup of his humiliations and miseries, though full enough, however known was yet to be made to overflow. The servants, consisting of a footman and three females had got something more than an inkling of what had passed: for they had been carefully listening on the stairs. Accordingly, these amiable beings, on whose trustworthiness the saint had flattered himself he could so implicitly rely, suddenly made their appearance in a posse, and requested to know his intentions. With affrighted looks he intimated his purpose to pay them their wages at once and decline their farther services. The footman, as spokesman, made sundry and divers demands for compensation in lieu of proper notice; and he pretty plainly intimated that something in the shape of hush-money must likewise be forthcoming. To all these demands Mr. Choker found himself compelled to submit; and it cost him a pretty penny to purchase the silence of those individuals. The villa was given up that very day; and Mr. White Choker returned into the bosom of his family a wiser if not a better man. But the next time he attended the committee of the Foreign Cannibal-Reclaiming, Negro-Christianising, and Naked-Savage-Clothing Society, he for a long time sat on thorns for fear lest the affair should have got wind. As Snuffnose was however silent, Mr. Choker gathered courage: but for many a long day afterwards he groaned as he walked about—and at night his excellent better half fancied that she must be troubled with indigestion because of the restlessness of his dreams.

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE CHATEAU.

THE scene now changes to the south of France.

In the neighbourhood of one of those beautiful villages which ornament the valleys on the outskirts of the Pyrenees, stood a large, old-fashioned, rambling, dark brick edifice known as the Chateau. It had originally belonged to a noble and ancient family which had emigrated during the troubles of the first revolution; and that family had become extinct in a foreign clime. The Chateau was once the centre of a spacious and fair domain; but this had become parcelled out into small farms and allotments—so that at the time of which we are writing—namely, a few years back—the lands which had once constituted the domain of a single individual were in the possession of at least a score of different proprietors.

The Chateau itself had long been shut up; and with only the garden remaining attached to it, it had become the property of a lawyer in the adjacent village. Having been neglected for a greater number of years, the building had sustained considerable injury; and the lawyer, finding it difficult to obtain a wealthy tenant, had felt by no means inclined to lay out money in repairing a place which seemed destined to remain empty. It was only fitted from its dimensions for the occupation of a wealthy family having a large establishment of servants; but no family of such means was likely to take a mansion that had such a small patch of land attached, and this surrounded by the allotments of poor proprietors. Besides, it would have required thousands of pounds to furnish the Chateau suitably; and as no rich family would think of burying themselves entirely in that seclusion, but would assuredly pass at least a moiety of the year in the gay capital, it was equally improbable that any one would incur such an enormous expense to furnish the Chateau as a mere temporary residence for a few months at a time. It must likewise be observed that superstition had lent its aid to render the old Chateau all the more difficult to let; and thus, as we have said, for many long years it had remained empty.

At length, some five years previous to the date which our story has reached, an elderly French gentleman, accompanied by his daughter, and attended only by one female domestic, arrived in the neighbouring village—where they took lodgings for a few weeks. We will presently describe them more particularly. Suffice it for the present to say that M. Volney—for this was the gentleman's name—began to make inquiries about the Chateau; and after some little negotiation with the lawyer, he took it. Everybody in the village was surprised: for there were several small and picturesque houses to let in the neighbourhood, any one of which would have been large enough for the accommodation of so small a family as the Volneys. But on other hand, the Chateau was to be let at a rental less than even that of either one on the houses just alluded to; and it was therefore conjectured that this might be a consideration with a man whose means were evidently exceedingly limited. Indeed, the rent asked of him for the Chateau was to be little more than a mere nominal sum for the first term of seven years. Superstition, as we have already said, had given the Chateau a bad name; and the lawyer to whom it belonged, naturally anxious to improve his property by amending its reputation, calculated that if respectable people lived in it for a period, its former character as a haunted house would be forgotten. And then, too, M. Volney undertook to make certain repairs, as well as to restore the garden: and thus under all these circumstances, the lawyer was well enough contented with a comparatively nominal rental.

On the other hand, the Chateau seemed to suit M. Volney's disposition and frame of mind—and according to conjecture, his pecuniary means likewise. He was a man bordering upon sixty at the time when we purpose to introduce him to our reader. Somewhat above the middle height, he was thin; and though still in possession of full activity of limb, yet his pace was invariably slow, as if measured according to the solemn gloom of his thoughts. His countenance was pale with the evidences of some deeply seated sorrow indelibly stamped upon it. His gaze was cold and searching; no one at the first glance or at the first meeting with M. Volney, would become prepossessed

in his favour. His manners were as cold as his looks: there was something in them which repelled an advance towards friendship, and seemed to render an intimacy impossible. He spoke but little—never unnecessarily—and as much as possible in mere monosyllables. Yet despite that glacial gaze—that freezing manner—that undisguised dislike for conversation, there was an unmistakable air of good breeding about M. Volney—that gloss of the courtly drawing-room which when once it invests the individual, can seldom be shaken off, any more than a talented person can by ordinary circumstances be rendered stupid or a well-educated one can become ignorant.

M. Volney was in the habit of taking long solitary walks; and yet it could scarcely be for the sake of the beautiful surrounding scenery, inasmuch as the sense of that or of any other enjoyment appeared to be dead within him. When he was encountered by any one of the rural inhabitants in those walks, he was invariably proceeding at the slow measured pace we have already alluded to—his eyes were bent down—and his whole demeanour indicated a deep pre-occupation of the thoughts. If out of respect the rustics saluted him as they passed, he would just acknowledge the compliment with a cold courtesy, in which however nothing of pride seemed blended: but he never stopped to exchange a syllable of conversation. When indoors, he was principally occupied in a little room which he had fitted up as a study or library, and the shelves of which contained a few books—but these of a sterling description. They consisted chiefly of scientific works, voyages, and travels, with a small sprinkling of the best French poets. There, in that study, M. Volney would pass hours together: though whether he were always reading, or whether he were much of that time communing with his own painful thoughts, was scarcely known even to his own daughter.

This lady was, at the period when we propose to introduce her to our readers, about two and twenty years of age. She was not above the middle stature—somewhat full in figure, but of good symmetry. She was neither handsome nor beautiful: but at the same time she might be pronounced good looking. A profusion of dark

brown hair—brows somewhat strongly pencilled—large hazel eyes—lips that were full and pouting, but not coarse—together with a splendid set of teeth—these may be rapidly summed up as her leading personal characteristics. Her nose was not perfectly straight: it had a slight, but very slightly downward inflexion, though not to the extent that warranted the application of the French term *retousse*. Her countenance was the least thing too much rounded to be consonant with perfect beauty; and there was even something sensuous in the configuration of the chin as well as in the formation of the mouth. Yet such was not the impression that would remain upon the mind of an observer in respect to her character; inasmuch as her eyes beamed only with innocence—her manners were modest and retiring—and her bearing was replete with a becoming lady-like dignity. Such was Clarine Volney, at the age of twenty-two.

The female servant who originally accompanied the father and daughter to that neighbourhood, was a middle aged woman, of respectable and matronly appearance. She had evidently been long in the family; for she regarded Clarine with that degree of affection which is shown by faithful domestics who have known young people from their birth, and in their childhood have nursed them upon their knees. In the presence of M. Volney, Marguerite—which was the female servant's name—was careful to address the young lady as *Mademoiselle*; but when they were alone together, she allowed herself the liberty of calling her *Clarine*. And Clarine herself displayed much attachment towards Marguerite, and never issued orders as if conscious of speaking to an inferior. We should observe that immediately after taking the Chateau, M. Volney hired a second female-servant, and also a gardener; so that his domestic establishment consisted of three persons.

A sufficient number of rooms in the central part of the building had been fitted up for the use of the family. At the nearest town M. Volney had purchased such furniture as he required; and though there was nothing elegant nor luxurious in the appointment of the rooms thus rendered habitable, they

were nevertheless replete with every comfort. The Volneys received no society and courted none: thus the few genteel families who resided in the neighbourhood, had abstained from calling upon them, inasmuch as they afforded no indications that such visits would be acceptable. We should however make an exception in favour of the village priest—a man well stricken in years, noted for his benevolence of disposition and the purity of his life; and this worthy minister of the Gospel was the only visitor from amidst the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. The reader may marvel what the old Chateau in the south of France and the Volney family can have to do with the progress of our tale: we may therefore at once proceed to state that if any interest be felt in the amiable and beautiful Zoe, the wife of Lord Octavian Meredith, she must now be sought within the walls of that Chateau.

Some explanations are requisite to show how this came about. We have already said that the Volney family had inhabited the Chateau—or rather a portion of it, for about five years previous to the time when we now introduce them upon the stage of our narrative. To say that M. Volney was an affectionate father, would be to imply that towards his daughter he unbent in a way of which his frigid demeanour seemed perfectly incapable. Nor did he. He was kind in his manner—and nothing more. Every morning, when entering the breakfast-parlour, Clarine imprinted a kiss on her father's cheek—the same at evening ere retiring to her chamber; but he merely received these filial salutations—he gave them not back in the form of paternal caresses. He never displayed any fondness towards her—much less lavished endearments; but on the other hand his demeanour was always of a uniform kindness—never capricious, and never finding unnecessary fault. Clarine was so accustomed to this demeanour on her father's part that she did not miss a fondness she had never experienced, and she had not to deplore the loss of a more tender love—for she had never known it. Her mother had died in her infancy: her father was always towards her what we now describe him; and never for a single instant had it occurred to Clarine that there was aught deficient

of a parent's true tenderness and affection on his part.

Five years had Clarine passed in the comparative solitude of that Chateau without a single lady-acquaintance, and with only the occasional visits of the priest to break in upon the monotony of this mode of life. During all that while it never seemed to have struck her father that he was keeping her out of that society which one of her years might naturally be supposed to crave. But all of a sudden he one day asked her whether she felt her mode of existence lonely? She replied in the negative: and she spoke the truth—she had grown accustomed to it. He nevertheless hinted at his intention to procure her some suitable female companionship: and he even went so far as to express a regret that he had not done so before. This was saying a great deal for M. Volney—and Clarine so little accustomed to such expressions from her father's lips, regarded the observation as one indicative of the utmost love and kindness.

Several weeks went by after that little conversation, the subject of which appeared to have totally escaped M. Volney's memory. He took his solitary walks as usual—shut himself up in his study as much as heretofore—and left his daughter as completely to her own resources as ever. But during this interval Clarine herself seemed likewise to have ceased to think of her father's transient promise: for instead of her spirits suffering from a prolonged monotony of the life she was leading, they grew gay and more cheerful than they were before. Thus, when one day, at the expiration of six weeks or a couple of months, her father told her with his accustomed abruptness that she would now at length have female companionship, she looked as if taken by surprise, and even as if the announcement afforded her not the slightest pleasure. But she was accustomed to pay implicit obedience to her sire's wishes; and she therefore offered, not a syllable of objection; while he on his part, did not seem to notice that the communication was received with less satisfaction than it might have been.

The announcement itself was made as the result of some little conversation

which had taken place between M. Volney and the village priest. It appeared that a young and beautiful English lady of rank, attended by two female domestics, had arrived at the village, on her way to seek some other part of the Pyrenees as a temporary residence. Being an invalid, she was detained by indisposition for some days in the village; she took a liking to the surrounding scenery; and she resolved to make a halt in that neighbourhood. During a visit to the picturesque little church, she had formed the acquaintance of the priest; and in the course of conversation she had expressed a desire to be received into some genteel but very quiet and secluded French family. The priest was already aware of M. Volney's desire to vary the monotony of his daughter's life; and he mentioned to him Lady Octavian Meredith's wish. The result was that Zoe, attended by her two domestics, took up her abode with M. and Mademoiselle Volney at the old Chateau.

Zoe had been given to understand that M. Volney, having experienced many griefs and cares during his life was unfitted for society, and was of misanthropic habit: but the worthy priest had told her on the other hand that she would find in Clarine Volney a gay and amiable companion. And such proved to be the case. While M. Volney continued his solitary walks, or remained shut up in his study, Zoe, and Clarine were almost constantly together. They soon formed a friendship which ripened into an affection for each other; and Lady Octavian Meredith appeared not to notice the gloom and sombre aspect of the old Chateau, so well was she pleased with the friend whom she had found there.

Lady Octavian was in ill-health; and this appeared in Clarine's estimation to affect her spirits somewhat—but in respect to her beauty, to render it all the more touchingly interesting. Zoe's countenance wore a sainted expression of true Christian resignation to whatsoever might be her fate: and for some time Clarine thought that it was an early death to which Zoe thus resigned herself. But as they grew more intimate, Lady Octavian unbosomed herself completely to her new friend: and then Clarine comprehended that it was not to a sense of physical evils

only to which Zoe was thus meekly bowing, but that it was likewise to the sorrow that was consuming her heart.

It will be necessary to afford the reader some idea of the internal arrangements of the Chateau. We have already said that it was a large straggling edifice; but all its parts were connected in some way or another. There was the main building—there were wings, communicated with by means of corridors: beyond these there were other buildings, which were reached by open passages, or rather colonnades. It was a mansion capacious enough for the accommodation of a large family, with forty or fifty servants. The reader may thence judge how the few inmates it now contained, would have been lost as it were if scattered about the edifice: but to prevent this extreme loneliness, all the rooms that were occupied were as much in assemblage as possible. The main body of the building had three storeys in addition to the ground-floor. The dining and breakfast-rooms, as well as M. Volney's study, where on the ground-floor—the drawing-room and all the principal bed-rooms on the first-floor—the servant's chambers on the second-floor; and the third or highest was totally unoccupied. Passages ran the entire length of the main building, on each of these floors; the principal staircase—the only one used by the present inmates—was in the middle of the building; but at each end there were smaller staircases, at the bottom of which were doors communicating with the corridors that led into the wings. The bed-chamber occupied by Clarine Volney and Lady Octavian Meredith, were, as already stated, on the first or drawing-room floor; and their windows looked on the garden at the back of the house. These chambers did not join each other; they were separated by an oratory, or small chapel, the appointments of which had become much dilapidated through neglect. There was an organ in this oratory; and Clarine one day informed Zoe that she had endeavoured to play it, but it was completely out of order. There was however a good piano as well as a harp in the drawing-room: for when M. Volney purchased his furniture, he had not forgotten that Clarine had an exquisite taste for music;—and now, as Zoe was likewise gifted in that

and which rendered her nervous and uneasy. What could it mean? Zoe was strong-minded and little prone to superstitious terror: but now for the first time since she became an inmate of the Chateau, did she feel as if its loneliness and gloom struck cold to her heart. Essaying all she could to conquer the feeling, she hastened to seek her couch: but it was sometime before sleep visited her eyes.

When Honor, her principal maid, entered the room in the morning, Zoe was about to tell her what she had seen—or thought she had seen on the previous evening: but suddenly feeling ashamed of herself, she held her peace. The topic however was brought about in another way: for as the maid was combing out the long light beautiful hair of her mistress, she said, "Does your ladyship know that this old mansion has a very strange repute?"

"Indeed?" said Zoe: and it was almost with a start that she had heard her abigail's question.

"Yes, my lady," continued Honor; "and I and Rachel"—thus alluding to Zoe's other female servant—"have been kept awake nearly the whole night, thinking of what we heard for the first time before we went to bed."

"Many very old buildings," said Zoe, "have strange silly legends connected with them; and it is very foolish of you maids to terrify yourselves in this manner."

"I am not frightened now, my lady," answered the maid: "but at night time, when all is dark and silent, or else when only the moon is shining, it is a very different thing. It was the gardener who was telling us last evening—he speaks a little English, for he was with an English family for two years at Lyons some while ago—"

"And what did this narrator of marvels tell you?" inquired Lady Octavian Meredith, kindly endeavouring by an assumed gaiety of manner to dispel whatsoever remnant of superstitious fear might be lingering in the mind of her maid.

"I will tell your ladyship," responded Honor. "It was never before last evening that he touched upon the subject; because I think he dares not in old dame Marguerite's presence: but

she had gone to bed early through indisposition; and so the gardener's talkative."

"And what was it that he said?" again inquired Zoe, affecting a tone of indifference, though she in reality experienced a degree of interest in the expected narrative, for which she felt almost ashamed of herself.

"It seems, my lady," resumed the maid, "that when the first Revolution broke out, the noble family to which the Chateau belonged, fled to England and for a few years the building remained shut up. At length the Chateau and estate were given by the Republican Government to a gentleman named Lenoir, and who had rendered some signal services by placing in the hands of the authorities certain correspondence that fell in his way, and which proved the existence of a great royalist conspiracy. M. Lenoir was quite young—not above three or four and twenty: he was a staunch Republican; and, as I have said, he was rewarded for his services by having this Chateau and the domain then belonging to it, conceded to him. He came to take possession, accompanied by an uncle with whom he had always lived—for he had been left an orphan at an early age. The uncle, your ladyship understands, was therefore young M. Lenoir's heir in case of his dying childless. About a year passed; and one day the inmates of the Chateau were thrown into a state of alarm by the report that the young gentleman had been found dead in his bed. This was found to be only too true; he lay stretched upon the couch with his clothes on, and it was first supposed that he had died in a fit. But for some reason or another which the gardener does not recollect, suspicion of foul play attached itself to the uncle. The corpse of the deceased Lenoir was opened; and it was ascertained that he had been poisoned. The uncle was arrested—tried—and condemned. Before his execution he confessed the crime; and explained that he had mixed the poison in a night-draught which his nephew was in the habit of taking for a feverish thirst which oppressed him. From that period no tenant ever could be found for the Chateau until about five years ago, when M. Volney took it. And now, my lady, for the point of the story. It is said that the spirit

of young Lenoir has been seen in different parts of the building; and that sometimes an unearthly sound, like a continuous wailing moan, has been heard. At first there was an old couple left in charge of the Chateau: but they soon resigned their post—for they were nearly frightened to death. Others succeeded them: they saw the same spectacle, and heard the same noise. They therefore left also, until at last no one could be induced to take charge of the premises. Ah! I forgot to say that it is chiefly in this very passage young Lenoir has been seen; for it was in a room a little farther on, just beyond Mademoiselle Volney's that he was poisoned by his uncle."

Zoe made no comment: she was certainly so far struck by the tale that she wished either she had not heard it, or else that she had not seen, or fancied she had seen that which alarmed her on the previous evening.

"The gardener says, my lady, that all who ever saw the spirit, agree in the description of it. The young gentleman appears as he was when in life—tall and slender—perfectly upright—dressed as he was when discovered on the bed, with all his clothes on, but without boots or slippers; and his countenance is ghastly pale. He does not seem to walk exactly—but to glide slowly along with noiseless feet. Or else he has been just about to enter the room where he met his death; and then he turns that ghastly pale countenance of his slowly round upon whomsoever is passing along the passage at the time."

"I hope that neither you nor Rachel" said Zoe, "will give way to these childish superstitions:"—but even as she thus spoke, she shuddered involuntarily: for there was something in the present legend which corresponded singularly if not fearfully enough with the circumstance of the noiselessly gliding form which she had seen, or fancied that she had seen, on the preceding evening.

When at the breakfast-table, Lady Octavian Meredith exerted herself to assume as much gaiety as possible, and to appear easy in her mind: for she would not willingly have laid herself open to be questioned on a point where her answer would have to be connected with a superstitious terror. M. Volney

hurried over his breakfast as usual—then issued forth to take one of his long, mournful, solitary walks,—leaving the two ladies together. It was a beautiful day; and they presently strolled forth: but Zoe's health was too delicate to suffer her to ramble far; and when they reached the outskirts of a grove, they sat down to rest upon a verdant bank. Despite all her efforts to the contrary, Zoe could not help being at intervals pre-occupied and abstracted: Clarine perceived it; and mistaking the cause, endeavoured to speak soothingly in the sense which she fancied to regard her friend's mournful pensiveness.

"Your thoughts constantly travel back to your native land, my dear Zoe," said Clarine; "and methinks that you repent the sacrifice you are making. But do not give way to melancholy meditations: fortify yourself with all that courage which has hitherto so well sustained you; and if friendship has any soothing power, you know, dearest Zoe, that you possess mine."

"I know it, Clarine," answered Lady Octavian. "And now I feel inclined to unbosom myself more completely than I have ever yet done towards you. Listen—and I will give you my narrative in a continuous and connected form; for hitherto you have only heard it partially and piecemeal."

"Do not speak of it," said Clarine, "if it will distress you."

"On the contrary," replied Lady Octavian, "methinks it will have a soothing effect. You are already aware, Clarine," she continued, "that when I accompanied Lord Octavian to the altar, I deeply, deeply loved him—I deeply love him still! I have told you how I received into the house a young, amiable and beautiful creature, named Christina Ashton. I believed at that time that I possessed my husband's love as sincerely and as firmly as he possessed mine. Not for a single instant did I imagine it possible that he could look with love upon another: and I am bound to declare my conviction that the soul of Christina is as pure and virtuous as her person is beautiful. I supposed that my husband entertained a generous friendship towards a young lady who had experienced adversity: and the little attentions he paid her, were mistaken by me for the evidences of that kind and disinterested feeling,

I was one day destined to be most rudely awakened from this dream into which I had lulled myself—yes, cruelly indeed was I startled into a conviction of the truth! Lord Octavian was driving Christina and myself in an open chaise, when the horses ran away—and the vehicle was upset. I was not stunned—I was not even stupefied: I was merely bruised and hurt to some trifling extent; but from Octavian's lips rang forth the most passionate exclamations of alarm and despair—not in respect to myself, but on behalf of Christina! I was smitten with a fearful consternation: all the sources of life appeared to be suddenly paralyzed and frozen in me;—and yet my mind instantaneously recovered a horrible degree of clearness. Quick as lightning did the resolve take possession of me that I would not betray my knowledge of those words which had rung from Octavian's lips; for I felt that if I did the happiness of all three would be irremediably ruined. I therefore feigned unconsciousness; and the terrible energy which inspired my soul, enabled me to play my part without exciting a suspicion in the breast of either Octavian or Christina. And then I received the most unmistakable evidences of Christina's affectionate and devoted friendship, as well as of the deep compassionating regard which my husband entertained for me. A dangerous illness followed: for many days I was insensible; there was indeed no dissimulation there! And all that while Christina attended upon me as if she were my sister: she would not quit my chamber; and from the physician's lips did I subsequently receive the assurance that to the amiable and devoted Christina I owed my life. So soon as I approached convalescence, Christina intimated her intention to leave me. Full well did I comprehend the generous and noble-hearted girl's motive in adopting this course. I saw that her heart had not remained insensible to the personal appearance, the elegant manners, and captivating address of my husband Octavian—but that her own innate sense of propriety, as well as her friendship for me, had thus determined her in quitting a home which under other circumstances would have been such a happy one."

Here Zoe paused for a few moments, and effectually struggled to keep back

the tears which had flowed up almost to the brims of her eyes from the very fountains of her heart. She then continued in the following manner:—

"Some weeks passed after Christina left me; and I began to think that we ought not to remain altogether asunder, for I loved her as a sister—and I knew that she loved me with an equal depth of affection. Besides, she had saved my life; and I was incapable of ingratitude. I was also anxious to prevent her from suspecting that I had comprehended the motives which had induced her to leave me; for I had struggled hard at the time to veil what was passing in my own bosom. I resolved to see her; and taking advantage of an opportunity when I fancied that Lord Octavian would be absent on a visit to his father, I wrote to Christina, requesting her to come to me. She did so; and I saw how deeply she was affected on perceiving that my health was far from being restored. Something occurred to take Octavian's father suddenly and unexpectedly out of town; he could not therefore pay the intended visit—and he returned home. He found Christina there. As plainly as you, Clarine, can read the print of a book, could I read all that passed in the minds of Octavian and Christina—and how especially painful the ordeal was for that amiable and excellent girl. Heaven knows too, it was painful enough for me!—and often and often have I since wondered how I had the presence of mind sufficient to go through it, and how I could maintain the fortitude of a calm composure. I saw that Christina would give words for an excuse to depart—but that she dared not devise such a pretext for fear lest it should excite a suspicion in my own mind. On the other hand, with an equal yearning, did I long to afford her that pretext; but on my own side I dared not, for fear lest both herself and Octavian should perceive that I had fathomed the secret of their souls. At length that moment came for Christina to take her departure; and I did not ask her to return. No—I was deeply, deeply annoyed with myself for having invited her thither on that occasion,—an occasion so replete with painful sensations for us all!"

Zoe again paused—but only for a few moments; and then she resumed her

affecting narrative in the ensuing terms:—

"Several weeks again passed away, during which I had to sustain an incessant conflict with my own feelings. I could not help studying every look, word, and action on Octavian's part, in order to judge of the depth of his passion for Christina. I saw that he was most cruelly balanced between a sense of his duty towards myself and his love for Christina. I knew that he regarded me with a compassionate friendship, and that he strove hard to invoke the sentiment of gratitude to his aid: for it was through me that he had become enriched. At length I could endure that painful state of things no longer. Some women would have made it a subject of reproach to a husband that he dared to love another; but I was at least spared that injustice and that folly; for my common sense told me that Octavian had no power over his volition, and that he could not control the susceptibility of his heart. Other women would have abandoned themselves to a frantic outburst of grief, and would have implored their husbands to give them back the love to which they had a right. But again did my good sense intervene to save me from that folly; for I knew—alas, too well!—that where true love never existed, it could not be concealed to even the most tearful and imploring entreaties. Some women, too, might have given way to upbraiding and reproaches; but I was incapable of such foul injustice. I knew it was not Octavian's fault that he had learnt to love Christina:—as well might it have been made a reproach to me that I had loved Octavian! No—none of those resources would I bend to! It was my continuous study to avoid enhancing the painfulness of my husband's feelings, or to suffer him to perceive that I fathomed and comprehended them all. But what was I to do? To lead such an existence was impossible; it was killing myself by inches—it was suffering Octavian to perish also by slow suicidal degrees. We were converting our own hearts into instruments of self destruction; our feelings were becoming a slow poison for each. And then too I was continuously haunted by the conviction that Octavian was straining every nerve to keep the veil drawn down darkly over his own thoughts, and to lull me

into the belief that he loved me. On the other hand I dared not reject his caresses, nor look cold upon his assiduities, for fear lest he should perceive that I knew how forced, how unnatural, and how strained they all were!"

"It was indeed" said Clarine, in a soft sympathizing voice, "a fearful existence to lead."

"You cannot wonder therefore, my dear friend," resumed Zoe, "that I at length made up my mind to leave England. The state of my health did, alas! afford too ready a pretext; and the physicians agreed that my only chance of eventual recovery was by removal to a southern clime. On the eve of my intended departure I sent for Christina that I might bid her farewell. She came; and unmistakable were the proofs of friendship—nay, more, of sisterly love which the amiable girl gave me. We were alone together in the drawing-room; and on this occasion I comprehended not the speedy return of Lord Octavian. I had some little gift to present to Christina—a testimonial of my affectionate regard; and leaving the room, I ascended to my own chamber to procure it. On returning I heard voices in the drawing-room: they were those of my husband and Christina. I was riveted to the spot: I became a listener. It was a wild, impassioned scene that was taking place. Octavian was half mad. He had seen that I betrayed his secret—he comprehended the reasons which were urged against his departure from England: he was vehemently and frantically of my martyrdom. On the other hand, the conduct of Christina was admirable. It was full of deepest pathos and true maiden dignity; there was in it a work of generous feeling on my account together with the unmistakable assertion of her own virtuous principles and innate sense of rectitude. She rebuked Octavian when he dared speak of his love for her; she told him what his duty was towards myself. She urged him to accompany me to the Continent. But I will not dwell upon the scene: I cannot—my heart melts within me at the bare recollection. When I knew that it was drawing to a close I sped up to my own chamber; and heaven alone can tell what preternatural fortitude was conceded to me to enable

me to assume an air of calm composure—or at least of tranquil resignation—when Christina glided into my presence. Methinks that the amiable girl herself fancied I must have overheard what had just passed—or at least that I did indeed suspect the love which Octavian bore for her. Her deprecating looks seemed to ask my pardon that she should be, although so innocent, the cause of my unhappiness. But no word escaped the lips of either of us to give unmistakable expression to what we knew, or thought, or felt, or apprehended. Our farewells were exchanged amidst tears and lamentations at being thus severed; and Christina disappeared from my presence. Then I came abroad."

Here Zoe suddenly ceased; and Clarine, taking her hand, pressed it affectionately. She perceived two tears tracing their pearly path down Zoe's cheeks: the kind hearted French lady gazed with tenderest sympathy upon her English friend; and the latter, suddenly wiping away those tears, started up, saying "Come, Clarine—let us return to the Chateau."

They walked on in silence for some minutes,—both engaged in their reflections: for Clarine herself was now deeply pre-occupied. At length awakening from her own reverie, she said, "You have told me your sad tale dear Zoe, more completely than you had previously revealed it: but still you have not extended your confidence far enough to make me aware how you expect all this to end. Your health is improving—the colour is returning to your cheeks—you may have yet perhaps a long life before you—and you cannot remain for ever afar from your native land, separated from your parent, and dwelling in the seclusion of this old Chateau."

"Alas! my dear," responded Zoe, with a look and tone most pathetically sweet and full of an angelic resignation, "this colour which you behold upon my cheeks, deceives you, but does not deceive myself. I feel within me the germs of dissolution—the seeds of decay. Consumption is busy at my vitals: it has already planted its fatal sign upon my cheeks."

"Good heavens, speak not thus!" exclaimed Clarine, the tears gushing from her eyes. "It is distressing to a degree to hear one so young and so

beautiful as you thus talk as if death were already looking you in the face!"

"And yet it is so," rejoined Zoe, with a soft, sweet smile. "You perceive, Clarine, that I do not attempt to delude myself. When I was journeying to the south of France, I thought that I should like to find some seclusion, where, with only one friend, I might pass the remainder of my days:—and I have found it. I cling not to life. No—the approach of death will be welcomed by me. In the grave my own sorrows will cease; and the tomb will engulf the only obstacle to the alliance of Octavian with the object of his love. Yes—death will be welcomed! You may wonder how—conscious as I am that the elements of dissolution are actively at work within me—I should seem desirous of prolonging my existence by seeking this genial clime of Southern France: you may marvel likewise why—anxious as I am to advance and meet death half way—I did not rather settle myself in some congenial northern atmosphere. But that would be suicidal; and it is a crime for mortals to do aught knowingly to abridge the life which God has given. I no more dare be guilty of such wickedness than I dare leap down a precipice. If my head be giddy and I know that by walking on the edge of an abyss I should fall in, and in its profundities find that death which will be so welcome—it nevertheless is my duty to avoid the brim of the fatal gulf. Now you comprehend, Clarine, wherefore, though welcoming death, I may seem to cling to life—and wherefore, while knowing that the germs of disease are expanding fatally with me, I may appear to be seeking health in this salubrious Pyrenean region."

Zoe spoke with a most touching pathos, and yet without studying thus to invest her language with so deep an interest. Clarine listened with a heart full of emotions; but she made no reply. What could she say? All of a sudden Lady Octavian Meredith appeared to rally her spirits; and she said in even a cheerful tone, "It is some time since we went into the village: let us go thither—it will be a change of scene—and besides I have some few purchases to make."

To the village the ladies accordingly repaired; and on entering it, the first object that struck them was a new shop which had just been opened for

the sale of musical instruments. It was really a very handsome establishment for a small village: but then, as we have already hinted, there were several good houses and genteel families in the neighbourhood. The shop furnished a fine display of pianos; and one especially attracted the notice of Clarine. A card, which labelled it, indicated its price; and likewise by a few descriptive words showed that it was a much finer instrument than the one which she possessed at the old Chateau.

"If my father were rich," said Clarine, "I should ask him to purchase this beautiful instrument for me: for it has really put me quite out of conceit with my own piano."

It was merely in a careless conversational way that Clarine thus spoke,—just as young and inexperienced minds are wont to give expression to any passing whim or phantasy. Zoe at once secretly resolved to purchase the piano for her friend, and to avail herself of the first opportunity to come alone to the village for this purpose. But as they turned away from the shop-window, they perceived M. Volney standing behind them. His countenance was coldly calm and melancholy as usual: he did not appear to have the intention of taking his daughter and Zoe by surprise; nor did he seem to notice the sudden stare which was given by both—especially by Clarine—as they thus found themselves face to face with him.

"If you wish for that piano, Clarine," said M. Volney, in his wonted glacial monotony of tone, you shall have it."

Then, without another word, he entered the shop—looked at the card labelling the piano, to ascertain its price—and bade the tradesman send the instrument at his earliest leisure to the Chateau, where the amount should be promptly paid. The arrangement was concluded in half a dozen words: there was no haggling on M. Volney's part—he asked not the tradesman to abate a single franc of the price marked upon the card; and when the matter was settled, M. Volney lifted his hat to Zoe, and passed on his way.

CHAPTER CI.

THE STUDY.

CLARENCE was perfectly astonished at her father's liberality. The sum he had just agreed to pay on her behalf, was a large one; and, as we have seen, she had previously fancied it to be totally incompatible with his means. She could not rightly comprehend whether he were stretching a point in a pecuniary sense for the purpose of affording her pleasure—or whether he were in reality better off than she had hitherto supposed him. She expressed herself in this uncertain manner to Lady Octavian Meredith, as they slowly retraced their way from the village to the Chateau.

"Your father," said Zoe, "has just done you a great kindness in his own peculiar way. He used as few words as possible; but I have no doubt that in his heart he was rejoiced at being enabled to afford you pleasure."

"My father is always kind to me," answered Clarine, who sincerely believed what she was saying; "and I am convinced that he loves me dearly. I do not remember for years past that he has spoken a harsh word to me."

"Has your mother long been dead?" inquired Lady Octavian Meredith.

"Ever since I was a child," responded Clarine; "and I have no recollection of her. I think that my father must have loved her very, very dearly; because he cannot bear to speak of her. I remember that when I was a girl I used sometimes to ask him about my mother; but he invariably besought me not to mention her name. And then, too, I recollect he would turn aside abruptly, and would press his hand to his brow and seem deeply affected. Of late years I have never alluded to my departed mother: for I have been afraid of giving my father pain. You see that he is afflicted with some secret care. I do not think it is through the loss of property, as some persons have supposed—"

"Your father, then has been richer than he now is?" said Lady Octavian inquiringly.

"We used to live at a beautiful country-seat in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau," answered Clarine. "It was not large, nor was the annexed estate spacious; but the house was

commodious and very handsomely furnished in a somewhat antique style. We had eight or nine servants—for my father kept his carriage then: but still we saw very little company—my father never was fond of mingling with society—at least not within my recollection. He was always accustomed to be much alone, and to shut himself up for hours together in his own apartment. I remember too that he always had the habit of taking his long solitary walks as he does now. These circumstances make me think that it cannot be the loss of property which is preying upon his mind—because he was the same at our beautiful abode near Fontainebleau as he has been ever since we have dwelt in this Chateau."

"How was it that M. Volney lost his property?" asked Zoo.

"I am not even sure that he lost it at all," replied Clarine; "I only surmise so. It was a little more than five years ago that he one day told me we were going to remove to some other place; and on the very same day a post-chaise bore us off from that beautiful country-seat. Of all the servants old Marguerite alone accompanied us."

"And was the house shut up?" asked Lady Octavian.

"I do not know," responded Clarine. "We left it just as it was, with all the other servants in it, but whether my father, previous to our departure, made any arrangement in respect to the house and the domestics I am unable to say. He has never spoken on the subject; and old Marguerite is really ignorant upon the point—or else she has always pretended—to be. She nursed me in my infancy; and to a certain extent supplied the place of the mother whom I lost. This is why I love and revere her and this is also the reason why, when my father is not present, she allows herself to address me in terms of endearing familiarity."

"And from that beautiful country-seat you came direct to this Chateau?" said Lady Octavian interrogatively.

"Yes; but I am convinced that when we left that country-seat my father had no fixed idea where he was about to settle his future abode. It was not his intention to remain in the village—or near it. According to the few

words he let fall upon the subject at the time I have reason to believe that he thought of passing into Spain. It was only after an accidental visit to the Chateau during one of his rambles that he suddenly took it into his head to settle himself there. You see, my dear Zoo, I have no reason for believing that my father lost any of his property beyond the simple fact of his abandoning such a beautiful residence in order to shut himself up in this old place."

"Perhaps, after all," suggested Lady Octavian, "M. Volney is as rich as ever he was, but inasmuch as seclusion suits the temper of his mind far better than even the limited society which you appear to have had in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau, he has chosen to bury himself in the Chateau?"

"It may be so," answered Clarine; "but my father never speaks to me of his affairs—and I never ask him any questions. You see he never receives any visitors except the worthy old priest; and I believe that I should not have enjoyed the happiness of your society my dear Zoo, unless it were that my father had one day bestowed himself I might possibly find my mode of existence unreasonably dull."

"Yes, indeed," observed Zoo, rather in a teasing manner than speaking expressly to be overheard by Clarine; "it does seem hard to debar you from all society!"

"Oh, I require none!" exclaimed Clarine heartily.—"none more than I now possess! I can assure you I do not!" she added with a degree of earnestness which appeared unnecessary for the enforcement of the simple assurance which she thus gave.

They now reached the Chateau; and after a temporary repatriation to their respective chambers in order to put off their walking apparel, they met in the drawing-room. About an hour afterwards a cart drew up to the front of the Chateau; Clarine, running to the window perceived that it contained the newly purchased piano. It was brought up into the drawing room,—the tradesman himself having accompanied it in order to see that it was properly taken care of by his men. When he had superintended all that was necessary, he presented his bill according to the intimation given him by M. Volney.

M. Volney was in his study; and thither Clarine sped with the bill in her hand. She entered, and presented it to her father. He took it—flung a single glance at the amount specified—and rising from his seat opened an iron safe. Taking thence a large tin box, he unlocked it; and Clarine perceived that one compartment was full of gold and another of bank notes. Mr Volney took out a roll of those notes to select a couple for a thousand francs (or forty pounds) each; and Clarine, who was watching him with mingled curiosity and surprise, was enabled to observe even at a glance and at the roughest calculation that the tin box contained an enormous sum of money. As M. Volney looked up to give her the notes which he had selected, he perceived the wonder and surprise expressed in her features; and for a moment a cloud passed over his countenance. But the next instant it was gone; and he said in a voice of unusual kindness, and even with a faint smile upon his lips, "You did not perhaps know that I possessed such ample resources. It may be that I have shown you too little confidence—However," he added, suddenly checking himself, "it is as well this opportunity should have occurred for me to say that all that I have is your's; and if anything should suddenly happen to me, you will know where to find that which will maintain you in comfort—aye, in affluence for the whole of your life."

"Good heavens my dear father!" exclaimed Clarine, the tears gushing from her eyes: "do not speak on such subjects!—it seems as if I were about to lose you!"

"Remember, Clarine," answered M. Volney, with an increasing mildness of tone, "I am advanced in years; and according to the course of nature—even setting apart those casualties from accident or sickness to which we are all liable—But do not weep—do not weep! I thought I had just now done something to afford you pleasure. Poor girl! you have not known much of happiness lately—and I would not now throw a damp upon that satisfaction which I hoped to afford you."

"I am glad, dear father," replied Clarine, smiling through her tears, and then quickly brushing them away, "that you now give me an opportunity

of expressing my gratitude for your goodness in respect to the piano."

Thus speaking, Clarine took her father's hand and pressed it to her lips. He gazed upon her with a singularly melancholy expression for a few moments; then it seemed as if a sudden access of rage, fierce and bitter swept over his countenance; but in a moment this in its turn vanished;—and smoothing down the glossy hair of the amazed and half-affrighted Clarine, M Volney said in a tone full of emotion, "poor girl, if I thought that I had the right——"

But he suddenly stopped short, and as abruptly turned away—yet not so quickly as to prevent Clarine from catching the look of inexpressible anguish which seized upon his features. The young lady could have shrieked out—there was something so fearful in that look; but she subdued her emotion sufficiently to avoid giving such vent to it. She longed to approach her sire—to ask him what he meant, and what dire woe was afflicting him; but she dared not! And now for the first time Clarine's eyes were open to the fact that she had been all along totally excluded from her father's confidence in every matter in which a daughter might legitimately enjoy it.

"Clarine," said M. Volney, again turning towards her, and speaking with his habitual cold kindness of tone, if the reader can understand the phrase—"forget what has just passed—forget the unfinished sentence which came from my lips. But you cannot understand it—and you never, never shall! As for this dress," he said, glancing with glacial contempt towards the treasure in the large tin box, "do not gossip about having seen it: we live in a secluded place, and it were as well not to suffer whispers to get abroad that may tempt desperate men to a lawless act. And now go, Clarine—forget, I say, what has passed—and be happy, my dear girl—be happy with your new piano. Henceforth in other things, as in this trifling one, will I study your happiness more than I have hitherto done."

M. Volney pressed his lips for a moment to his daughter's forehead—and then gently pushed her from the room. She sped to her own chamber, where she remained for a few minutes to

tranquillize her thoughts and compose her feelings before she returned to the drawing-room—for she did not wish to be questioned by Lady Octavian Meredith: her father had enjoined her to forget what had just passed—and though it were impossible to do this, yet at least she resolved to consider it as sacred. She had suddenly discovered that so far from her sire having lost his property he was immensely rich; and more than ever, therefore, did she marvel why he should have left his own beautiful mansion and pleasant little estate in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau to bury himself in the gloomy old Chateau on the outskirts of the Pyrenees. Other things likewise entered into the midst of Clarine's thoughts; but with these we have nothing to do—at least for the present."

Having sufficiently composed her countenance, the young lady returned to the drawing-room, where the piano-seller had just finished putting the instrument into proper tune. His account was paid, and he took his departure. Zoe and Clarine now took their turns to try the new purchase; and they were enraptured with it. It was truly a splendid instrument; and they both brought out its fine tones with the grandest effect. They practised together for the greater portion of the rest of that day: but amidst the joy which Clarine experienced in possessing the coveted piano, would come the recollection, saddening and sickening, of that look of indescribable anguish which had swept over her father's features during her singular interview with him in the study. That interview had in a few moments given Clarine's mind the experience of whole years: a veil seemed to go fallen from her eyes: and she was led to reflect upon things on which she had never reflected before. She now saw that there was some deep mystery connected with her parent,—a mystery for which not even the loss of a much loved wife (as she supposed her mother to have been) could possibly account. Then, what was it? Clarine was bewildered; there seemed no earthly clue to the solution of that mystery;—and moreover it appeared to be her father's resolve that, whatever it were, the secret should die with him.

The ladies separated a little after tea o'clock in the evening, and sought their respective chambers. Zoe was on this occasion attended in her room by Rachel—for the maids took their turn to wait upon their mistresses; and Honor had tended her ladyship in the morning. A glance at Rachel's countenance showed Zoe that the girl was labouring under a sense of terror which she vainly endeavoured to conceal. At first Lady Octavian thought of leaving the circumstance unnoticed in order to avoid a discourse upon superstitious matters, but she perceived that Rachel was trembling to such a degree that she felt it would only be an act of kindness to encourage and re-assure her.

"Rachel," her ladyship accordingly said, "that foolish girl Honor has been infecting you with her terrors. I sincerely hope you will not give way to such childish delusions——"

"Pardon me, my lady, if I seem frightened," interrupted Rachel: "but one cannot always control one's thoughts. I was sitting here all alone, waiting for your ladyship; and all kinds of disagreeable sensations began to creep over me. I looked towards the window and thought I saw a ghastly pale face gazing in at me, so I went and closed the draperies. Then, as I looked towards the bed, I fancied that I saw that same face looking out from behind the curtains; and it was over so long before I could muster up the courage to go and peep behind them and satisfy my mind there was no one there. Scarcely had I recovered from his alarm, when the door opened; and such a cold chill swept through me! for I thought I saw some one looking in at me! But again I mustered up my courage: I peeped out into the passage——and there was no one. That nasty door has got such a wretched look, it opens of its own accord!"

"You have been giving way, my poor girl," said Zoe, "to the hallucinations of your frightened fancy. You must be more courageous. I can dispense with your services this evening; I intend to read a little before retiring to rest; and as you are nervous and uneasy, I will accompany you as far as the door of your own chamber. But you must not tell Honor that I did this—as it is for the first and last time."

and henceforth I shall expect both of you to exhibit more courage."

Zoe did not really intend to sit up ending before she sought her couch; but with the kindest consideration she made this a pretext for seeing the terrified Rachel as far as her own chamber. The girl was exceedingly grateful to her mistress; for she was indeed labouring under a nervous repudiation and a sense of superstitious error which she could not possibly shake off.

"We must tread lightly," said Zoe: "for I would not have it supposed by the other inmates of the Chateau that the possess maids so foolish as to be afraid to go to their own rooms by themselves."

It was with a tone and look of benignant remonstrance that Lady Octavian thus spoke. Taking a taper in her hand, she accompanied Rachel to the storey above, where the young woman and Honor jointly occupied the same chamber. Zoe then retraced her way down the staircase towards her own apartment,—on entering which she recollected that she had left her watch in the drawing-room on account of having accidentally broken the particular chain she had worn that day. It was not altogether without a certain feeling of apprehension that Lady Octavian crossed the passage and re-entered the drawing-room. The circumstance of the preceding night, and the legend she had heard in the morning, had been vividly recalled to her memory by the spectacle of Rachel's fears. But Zoe did her best to throw off the feeling that was upon her—which was indeed repugnant to her own good sense—and of which she was all the more ashamed after the sort of remonstrating lesson she had a few minutes back been reading to Rachel.

Entering the drawing-room, Lady Octavian Meredith took the watch from the table where she had left it; and she then issued forth again. But scarcely had she crossed the threshold—scarcely had her foot touched the floor of the passage—when she nearly dropped the taper from her hand; and she could with difficulty express an ejaculation of terror on beholding a dimly defined shape gliding onward in the distance. She was suddenly transfixed to the spot with a cold terror: if she could have seen her countenance

in the mirror at that instant, she would have been horrified at it, for it was pale as death. Her eyes followed the form with the natural keenness of her vision sharpened to the intensest degree. Whether it were fancy, or whether it were reality, she could not subsequently determine in her own mind; but it certainly seemed to her that the shape was that of a tall slender young man, dressed in dark garments, and that he was gliding onward with footsteps completely noiseless, raising not the faintest echo in that long passage where even the slightest sound was wont to reverberate!

The apparition—or whatever it were—was lost in the obscurity prevailing at the end of the passage. Zoe staggered across to her own chamber; and sinking into a large easy chair, felt, as if consciousness were about to abandon her. But by one of those sudden almost preternatural efforts which the human mind sometimes makes, she summoned up all her courage to her aid—and said to herself "How foolish—how childish of me! It could have been nothing but fancy!"

And yet she could not persuade herself that it was so: the conviction was strong in her mind that she had seen *something*—but whether a spirit from the dead, or a living intruder, she could not tell. The superstitious fear which was still upon her, prevented her from altogether repudiating the former belief, on account of the gliding noiselessness with which the form had hurried onward. For an instant she was half inclined to seek Clarine's chamber and acquaint her with what had happened: but the next moment she felt ashamed of even allowing such an idea to enter her head. She retired to rest: but it was long before sleep visited her eyes;—and when slumber at length stole upon her, the whole dismal tragedy associated with the Chateau was re-enacted before her mental vision.

When Lady Octavian Meredith awoke in the morning she hastened to draw aside the window draperies; and the bright September sun poured in so golden a flood of lustre that all her superstitious apprehensions were instantaneously dispelled—and she smiled at what she considered to have been her folly of the preceding evening. How glad she was now that she had not

sought Mademoiselle Volney's chamber with the history of the idea fears!

"Yes," said Zoe to herself, "it was naught but the imagination! The discourse I held with Rachel—the circumstance of conducting the girl to her own chamber—and the vivid conjuring up of the legend I had heard in the morning,—these were the causes which operated upon my mind, enfeebled perhaps somewhat by care and indisposition. Yes—truly it was naught but fancy on my part!"

It was Rachel's turn to take the morning duty at the toilet of her mistress; and when the abigail entered the chamber, she found Zoe more than cheerful than she had been for some time past: for such was the natural effect of a relief from superstitious terrors. Not another syllable was exchanged upon the subject; and Lady Octavian proceeded to the breakfast-parlour,—where she found Clarine, and where M. Volney speedily made his appearance. Zoe could not help thinking that there was a certain dejection in Clarine's looks—a certain despondency which she was endeavoring either to throw off or to conceal. Lady Octavian studied well the countenance and manner of her French friend—but without appearing to do so. She felt persuaded in her own mind that there was really something which hung like a weight upon Mademoiselle Volney's spirits; and now she asked herself whether Clarine could have also seen something to excite her superstitious terrors?

CHAPTER CII.

M. VOLNEY.

THE weather was beautiful; and soon after breakfast the two ladies walked forth together. Zoe now perceived that Clarine was more pensive than even while at breakfast-table—or at least that she struggled less ardently to veil it—probably because she had been most anxious to conceal her feelings, whatsoever they were, from her father's observation.

"My dear Clarine," said Lady Octavian, at length, "there is something praying upon your mind?"

Clarine gave the sudden start of one who cherished a secret which had just

been surprised—or rather the existence of which had just been detected, though the secret itself remained still locked up in her own bosom. She glanced with an air of anxiety towards Zoe—the bent down her looks—and said nothing but tears gushed from her eyes.

"My dear friend," continued Lady Octavian in the kindest manner, "ye yesterday assured me that if for my own sorrows a friendship could afford a balm, I possessed you're. It is no for me to reciprocate the assurance. Still here is the very bank on which we sat down yesterday when I gave you the complete narrative of my own causes of grief. Let it to-day become the scene of that confidence which you will repose in me? I will not so far insult myself, nor insult your own good feeling, Clarine, by saying more than simply to remark that it is from a motive of mere idle curiosity I speak."

"I know it, my dear friend—I know it!" murmured Clarine; and then from her lips escaped a gush of mental anguish which she could not possibly keep back.

Lady Octavian Meredith said whatsoever she could think of to console her friend; but ignorant as she was of the sources of Clarine's woe, it was difficult to shape her words in a form calculated to convey the solace she would fain impart.

"Yes—I will tell you what it is, thus—listen me," at length said Clarine "It was a tale I heard yesterday—last evening——"

"After we separated for the night?" inquired Zoe in surprise; "for that hour my dear Clarine, in thought that you were in good spirits—and all the more so on account of your father's kindness in respect to the piano?"

"Ah! my poor father!" murmured Clarine in a voice of the profoundest melancholy.

"Good heavens, what is it that you can have learnt?" exclaimed Zoe. "Was it some revelation which old Marguerite may have taken it into her head to make?"—for her ladyship could conceive no other source whence Clarine might have received any such revelation after the hour for retiring to rest.

"Yes—Marguerite—it was Marguerite!" said Clarine, hastily. "But I will tell you, my dear Zoe, what I have

learned! A veil has fallen from my eyes—and I have obtained an insight into the past which has most cruelly afflicted me!"

The young lady paused for a few moments: she was evidently struggling to compose her feelings as much as possible; and at length she addressed Zoe in the following manner:—

"My father in his former years was of a very different disposition from what he now appears to be. He was gay and sprightly—he loved society—though he never was dissipated nor irregular in his conduct. On the contrary, he ever bore the highest reputation for moral worth, honourable behaviour, and lofty feelings. He possessed a very dear friend of about his own age, and of a somewhat higher standing in society. This was the Viscount Delorme,—the bearer of an ancient title as well as the possessor of great wealth. They had been fellow-students together at college—they made the Continental tour together—though no bonds of kinship united them, yet was it a more than friendship which held them together. It was a true fraternal love. The Viscount Delorme has been described to me as one of the handsomest as well as the most elegant and fascinating of men. He married a young and beautiful lady, who died in giving birth to a son. The Viscount was inconsolable for her loss; he shut himself up in his own chamber—my father was the only person whom he would see. His health suffered; and his physicians earnestly recommended that he should travel, in order that change of scene might have a salutary effect upon his spirits. My father offered to accompany him—and for this purpose to postpone the alliance which he was about to contract with the object of his own love. Such a circumstance may afford you, my dear Zoe, an idea of the strength of that friendship which my father experienced towards the Viscount—a friendship which would even have led him to sacrifice, for the time being, the consummation of his own fondest hopes. But the Viscount would not hear of it; and in order to escape from my father's well-meant importunities that he should accompany him, Delorme took his departure suddenly and stealthily, without leaving a clue to the direction in which his contemplated

journey lay. He however left behind him a letter for my father, promising that he would write so soon as his mind should have somewhat recovered from the effects of the terrible bereavement he had sustained. His infant son the Viscount had been consigned to the care of a distant female relative—a Marchioness of considerable wealth, and who resided in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau,—where, I should observe, the Viscount Delorme's country mansion was situated—as you already know that my father's likewise was. Shortly after the Viscount's departure my father espoused the object of his love—my mother."

Here Clarine became deeply affected, as if that allusion to her long departed mother had re-opened the fountains of her grief. But at length conquering her emotions, she continued her narrative in the ensuing manner:—

"The marriage of my father and mother took place about six-and-twenty years ago. At the expiration of a year a daughter was born,—who, if she had lived, would have been my elder sister: but she died a few months after her birth from one of those maladies which are peculiar to infancy. Eighteen months had elapsed without the slightest intelligence being received from the Viscount Delorme, either by my father, or the Marchioness who had the care of his child; and it was feared that he had died in some foreign land. But at length letters arrived to announce that he was still a denizen of this world—that he had travelled through many climes—and that he had resolved not to sadden the minds of his friends with the spectacle of his own sorrows until they were worn down to the healthier tone of resignation. Such was the mood, according to the letters, to which the Viscount had at length brought himself; and he concluded by announcing his speedy return to his domain near Fontainebleau. These letters were written from Italy: and about three months after their arrival in France, the Viscount himself reappeared at Fontainebleau. I need hardly say that he was cordially welcomed by my father, as well as by the Marchioness—or that he was delighted to observe how his beloved boy had thriven. He settled down once more at his palatial mansion; and the

Marchioness surrendered up the little Alfred to the parental protection. Time passed on: the mind of the Viscount appeared to have completely recovered from its shock; and even the mournfulness which had succeeded upon the phase of bitter affliction was yielding in its turn to happier influences. The friendship between my father and himself continued as warm as ever; and as you may easily suppose, the Viscount was a constant guest at the Volney mansion. After an interval of between three and four years since the birth of the first child, my older sister—an interval which made my father apprehend that he was now destined to continue childless—I was born. Great was the joy of my parents as I have been informed; and though perhaps my father could have wished for an heir to his name, he was nevertheless filled with enthusiastic happiness when contemplating his infant daughter. And now, my dear Zoe, I am about to touch upon the saddest portion of my tale—that episode in last night's series of revelations which has filled me with so much grief!

Clarine again paused for a few instants: the tears trickled from her eyes; and Lady Octavian spoke in the most soothing terms which her imagination could suggest. Mademoiselle Volney pressed her friend's hand affectionately—wiped away her tears—and pursued her narrative in the following terms:—

"I was scarcely a year old when a frightful suspicion suddenly seized upon my father. Oh dearest Zoe! how can I continue?—how can I pursue a theme which sheds dishonour upon my mother's name—that mother whom I have ever thought of with love and reverence, although she perished ere her image could be imprinted upon my mind! It is a painful task which I have undertaken—and yet my soul yearns to make you the confidant of its sorrows! I will compose myself sufficiently to enable me to proceed. Yes—a frightful suspicion struck athwart my father's brain—and it was speedily confirmed! My mother had learnt to love the Viscount Delorme better than her own lawful husband. You understand me, Zoe?"

"Alas too well, dearest Clarine!" responded Lady Octavian, deeply affected. "But was there no possibility of

error?—might not your father have mistaken some transient levity for a evidence of guilt?"

"Alas, no!" replied Clarine, in a voice full of the most melanchol pathos: "the evidence was irresistible—my father was dishonoured in his wife—and oh, that wife was my mother! Can you conceive any treachery so dark—and perfidy so black as that of which the Viscount Delorme was guilty? The explosion was terrific—and the Viscount fled to avoid the vengeance which my half-frenzied sire vowed to wreak upon him. Alas for my mother!"

"What became of her?" inquired Zoe in a half-hushed voice, as if fearing to put the question: for Clarine had suddenly stopped short—the tears were again trickling down her cheeks—and her bosom was heaving with the sob that inwardly convulsed it.

"My mother," she said, in a tone that was scarcely audible—"my mother—alas! she received a shock from which she never recovered! Overwhelmed with the sense of her own degradation, and of the wreck which she had wrought with regard to a fond devoted husband's happiness—she died of a broken heart!"

There was another long pause; and then Clarine, after another outburst of grief, continued as follows:—

"The Viscount Delorme had not only proved himself a black traitor to the sacred tie of friendship, but also a coward. He had fled to avoid the duel to which my innocent father purposed to provoke him. Yes—he fled, leaving his child behind him; and thus the little Alfred became once more indebted to the kind care of the Marchioness. My father could not endure to remain at his own mansion—the scene where so much happiness had been so cruelly blighted! He set out for some other clime, taking me with him. Marguerite was my nurse. It was my father's intention to proceed to Italy—I know not whether with any settled purpose—or whether he fixed at random upon that trans-alpine country, all places in the world being equally the same to him in the desolated condition of his heart. We traversed the Alps by easy stages; for at every halting-place it appears that my poor father went wandering out amidst those dangerous glacier-regions, and that sometimes his rambles were

so protracted it was feared that he was lost. Marguerite well remembers that journey: she spoke of it last evening in vivid language. She recollects how we were nearly lost on the heights of Mount St. Bernard—and how the dogs of the Hospice, were the instruments of our salvation. She likewise bears in mind how we tarried several days at that Hospice, and in what constant terror she was sustained by the protracted absence of my father amidst those glacier regions so sublime, so terrible! We passed on into Italy: but instead of tarrying there, as it first of all appeared to be my father's intention, he hurried on the journey to Leghorn: there we took ship for Marseilles; and from Marseilles we travelled straight back to the mansion near Fontainebleau. There my father settled down again, after an absence of about four months: and I was too young at the time to receive any lasting impressions of the journey. Never, my dear Zoe, until last night was I aware that these eyes of mine had gazed upon the Alps, or that I had ever passed beyond the frontier of France. I must observe that in consequence of the scandal excited by the Viscount Delorme's infamy in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau, his respectable relative the Marchioness quitted her mansion, taking the boy Alfred with her; and she proceeded to another estate which she had in the western part of France. Years then passed away."

"Years passed away," said Zoe, mournfully and mechanically repeating Clarine's words; "and you, my sweet friend, were brought up in ignorance of all that had taken place?"

"Yes," responded the young lady,— "in total ignorance! Never was the veil lifted from my eyes until last night. Oh! I am no longer at a loss to comprehend wherefore my father was so impatient, or else so afflicted, whenever in the innocence of girlhood I spoke of my mother. Alas! what pangs must I have excited in his breast!—and heaven knows how unconsciously on my part! My heart weeps bitter tears as I think of it—and likewise because, my dear Zoe, it is shocking to be unable to look back with respect and with veneration towards the memory of a mother! Yes—and I now comprehend likewise," continued Clarine, her voice

sinking so low that it would have been inaudible were it not for the naturally harmonious clearness of its tones,— "I comprehend likewise what dreadful thought must sometimes be uppermost—perhaps *ever* uppermost in the mind of my father! Zoe, dearest friend," added the unhappy Clarine, with a strong convulsing shudder, and fixing haggard looks upon Lady Octavian's countenance, "I now comprehend—my God! I comprehend that he doubts whether I am his own child!"

With these words, Clarine threw herself upon Zoe's bosom and wept bitterly. Her own bosom was torn and rent with convulsing sobs:—for some minutes she appeared as if totally unsusceptible of solace. Zoe lavished sisterly caresses upon her—but she spoke no word: language itself were a mockery if seized upon as a resource to convey consolation under such circumstances. But there is no human anguish so profound that it does not expend itself: and thus was it at length with the grief of the unfortunate Clarine.

"Let me hasten, dear Zoe," she said, "to bring my unhappy narrative to a conclusion. But it is about to take a strange leap—and you will at first marvel how I am in a condition to tell you that which I am about to communicate. Nevertheless, it is the truth—it is no idle dream—no phantasy of the fervid imagination! I am about to speak of the Marchioness and of Delorme's son Alfred. Years passed away after the terrific explosion near Fontainebleau; and Alfred Delorme grew up under the affectionate care of his excellent relative. Meantime no tidings had been received from his father. The Marchioness had therefore long deemed the Viscount dead: but it was necessary that Alfred Delorme should reach his twentyfirst year before legal proceedings could be taken to establish his claim to the title and estates of his father. It appears that at the very time he attained his majority, some report of a marvellous and singular nature relative to the late Viscount reached the ears of the Marchioness. It was a statement of such a kind that though it seemed scarcely credible, she was resolved to sift it to the very bottom. Though stricken in years—indeed bordering upon sixty—she resolved for Alfred's sake to take this step. I am now speaking of a date between six and

seven years back. The Marchioness, in consequence of the intelligence to which I have just referred, resolved to undertake a journey into Switzerland. Alfred Delorme went with her. In due time they reached the Hospice of Mount St. Bernard: for this was their destination. There the Marchioness instituted the inquiries for which purpose she had dared a journey so perilous, and so trying for one of her years. The intelligence she had received in France was completely correct: the fate of the Viscount Delorme was cleared up—it ceased to be a mystery!"

"And that fate?" said Zoe, with a half hushed voice of suspense: for she experienced the liveliest interest in the narrative to which she was listening.

"It appears," continued Clarine, "that when the Viscount Delorme fled from Fontainebleau in order to avoid my father's vengeance, he was attended by only one domestic—a faithful valet who had been for some time in his service. Having before been in Italy, the Viscount determined to return to that country. On arriving at the village of Martigny in the valley which is overlooked by the towering heights of Mount St. Bernard, the valet was taken dangerously ill; and whether it were through an ungrateful recklessness for the man's fidelity—or whether it were for any other reason, I cannot tell you: but certain it is that the Viscount Delorme left him there amidst strangers, bidding him follow on to Naples if he should happen to recover. The valet *did* recover after a long and painful illness; and he proceeded to Naples. But there he could hear no tidings of his master. He returned to France—repaired to Fontainebleau—thence to the estate to which the Marchioness had removed—but still without learning aught of the Viscount Delorme. He therefore engaged himself in the service of another family, and many years then passed away. At length—about seven years ago—this valet was in the service of a family who proposed to visit Switzerland, and thence pass into Italy. A part of their plan was to cross Mount St. Bernard. They arrived in safety at the Hospice, where they were received with the welcome which the good monks of that Alpine asylum are accustomed to show to all travellers.

There is a museum of curiosities at the Hospice, most of them being the sad memorials of the perished ones whose corpses have been at different times found amidst the snows of the mountains. These curiosities, memorials, and relics were displayed to the family with whom the valet was travelling; and he himself likewise saw them. Amongst them he recognised a peculiar ring which had belonged to the Viscount Delorme. He questioned the monk on the subject; and it appeared, on reference to the catalogue, that this ring, together with other valuables were found upon the corpse of a gentleman several years back. The corpse, though completely preserved at the time, nevertheless afforded indications of having been for a considerable period previous to its discovery—perhaps two or three years—embedded in the snow drift where it was eventually found. There were no papers about the person of the unfortunate individual to show who he was: but he had several articles of jewellery and a considerable sum of money in his possession. It being impossible to establish his identity, the property thus found upon him was rendered available for the funds of the St. Bernard establishment, according to the laws of the Canton. For a long time the corpse was left exposed in the dead-house, in the hope that some passing traveller might chance to recognise it; for the dead are preserved for many years in a life-like state of freshness in that Alpine region. But at length the remains were interred, and as for the jewels, all had been converted into money with the exception of that one ring, which was kept as a means of affording some clue for accident to develop towards the identification of the deceased. It was this report which the valet on his return to France, conveyed to the ear of the Marchioness; and it was in consequence thereof that she at once undertook that a long and perilous journey, in company with Alfred Delorme, to ascertain for their own melancholy satisfaction the truth of the details which had thus reached them."

"How wildly singular is this tale!" said Zoe: "it is full of the marvel of romance. Well has the poet said that truth is stranger than fiction!"

Clarine said nothing: but again she buried her countenance in her kerchief and for several minutes appeared to be the prey of emotions which Lady Octavian Meredith considered as too profoundly sacred to be intruded upon by farther questioning.

CHAPTER CIII.

THE SOLEMN INJUNCTION.

THE ladies presently retraced their way towards the Chateau, Clarine had now become more calm; indeed she was evidently doing her best to compose her feelings and tranquillize her countenance, in case she should meet her father. Zoe considerably avoided a return to the topic of the previous conversation: for she understood full well wherefore Mademoiselle Volney was thus endeavouring to conquer her feelings—or at least to assume an outward serenity; and her amiable English friend would not willingly disturb her in that attempt. Zoe therefore discoursed upon general subjects, as they slowly wended their way back to the old Chateau: but Clarine only answered in a few words—sometimes in mere monosyllables:—she was deeply preoccupied.

When the Chateau was reached, the ladies separated to their chambers for the purpose of putting off their walking apparel; and Zoe had now more leisure to reflect upon all that she had so recently heard. It was indeed, as she herself had expressed it, a tale of wildest romance: and well—too well did it account for M. Volney's sombre moods, for his love of self-isolation, and for those long solitary walks which he was in the habit of taking, as if thereby courting opportunities to be as much alone as possible with his own thoughts. But there was one thing which bewildered Lady Octavian Meredith. She could not possibly conceive for what motive Marguerite had made such painful revelation to Clarine Volney. The old French woman had the air of a person possessed of generous feelings—her kindness towards Clarine had been the subject of the young lady's grateful eulogy: but Zoe could only regard that lifting of the veil from the mysteries of the past as a most unnecessary piece of cruelty

on old Marguerite's side. Wherefore so rudely awaken a daughter from a dream in which she had taught herself to love and respect her mother's memory?—wherefore breathe in the ear the tale of that mother's guilt?—wherefore disenchant her of the vision which had so innocent and in such sweet filial confidence delineated a halo encircling a mother's name?—and why (oh, cruellest detail of all) why plunge a dagger so deeply into Clarine's heart by the hideous intelligence that he whom she had looked upon as her father, entertained a horrible doubt as to his right of paternity?

In this channel flowed the reflection of Lady Octavian Meredith; but her surmises could furnish no possible solution for old Marguerite's conduct. She was loath to come to the conclusion that it was a wanton act of cruelty or inconsiderateness—especially as all Marguerite's antecedents appeared from what Zoe had that day heard, to be characterized by fidelity and affection towards the family whom she served, as well as by general prudence and direction. Had the old woman, therefore, some special motive?—was her conduct based upon good grounds?—Zoe was bewildered what to think.

She repaired to the drawing-room, where she found Clarine seated in a pensive mood at the window; and thinking to enliven her, Lady Octavian proposed to play upon the new piano. Then Clarine burst into tears.

"He who so kindly gave me that piano yesterday," said the afflicted young lady, doubtless whether I am really his daughter! And yet how generous of him thus to minister unto my whims and caprices! A thought occurred to me yesterday—and it was for the first time in my life—that the conduct of my father—for by *that* name must I ever call him—had been deficient in the tenderness of affection which a parent shows towards a child. But now, after all I learnt last night, I ought to wonder that he has ever shown me any love or kindness at all! Oh, my dear Zoe, with these dreadful ideas that are now floating in my brain, I feel as if I myself were utterly, utterly unworthy of all regard—all kindness on my father's part!"

"Speak not thus, dear Clarine," said Lady Octavian, "you are not responsible for your mother's frailty.

You must conquer your feelings--indeed, indeed you must! You do not wish your father to perceive that there is anything strange or unusual with you; and yet you are adopting the very course which may betray to him that your knowledge of to-day is far different from your knowledge of yesterday!"

The amiable Zoe continued to reason in this manner, and to give her friend Clarine the best possible advice. She even induced her to sit down and practise at the new piano: but the unhappy Mademoiselle Volney, though doing her best to assume a tranquil exterior, nevertheless seemed as if she had received a blow from which she would never recover.

During the dinner-time Zoe was in a continuous apprehension lest M. Volney should notice the frequent moods of pre-occupation and abstraction into which Clarine fell: but fortunately he did not--or if so, he appeared not to be conscious of the circumstance. He retired as usual to his study soon after dinner: the two ladies passed the evening together; and though Lady Octavian exerted herself to her utmost to cheer Clarine's spirits, the attempt was evidently ineffectual: for when Clarine forced herself to smile, it was in an sickly manner, the unhappy young lady's countenance appeared to reflect all the anguish of a breaking heart.

As the evening deepened, and the usual hour of separation was drawing nigh, Zoe's amiable and considerate disposition suggested an idea, which, she flattered herself, would be fraught with solace to her suffering friend.

"My dear Clarine, she said, "you are in such a frame of mind that I do not like to leave you by yourself for so many long, long hours. There is always consolation in the companionship of friendship: suffer me to pass the night with you?"

Sudden was the start, and for an instant singular and unaccountable was the look, with which Clarine received that kindly meant proposition: then the next moment winding her arms about Zoe's neck, she murmured, "No my dear friend! Think me not ungrateful--think not that I fail to appreciate your generous kindness: but it will be better for me to be alone with my own thoughts--to commune

with myself--and to, study well the pathway which I have henceforth to pursue!"

"I beseech you, Clarine," persisted Zoe, "to grant me my request. The night is gloomy--the weather has changed since the morning--the wind is moaning round and through the old Chateau; and when the mind is attenuated sorrowful thoughts--"

"Oh, I have no superstitious terrors!" ejaculated Clarine quickly. "A thousand thanks, my dear friend, for your kindness--a thousand thanks!--but I will pass the night alone--And perhaps to-morrow--to-morrow," she repeated, with a singularly anguished and abstracted look, "I shall be more resigned--I shall be all the better prepared to meet my end, sad destiny!"

For an instant it struck Zoe that there was something peculiar--something unnatural or at all events incomprehensibly mysterious in Clarine's look and manner, as well as in her tone: but when Mademoiselle Volney had embraced her and hurried forth from the apartment, Lady Octavian thought within herself, "It is the bitterness of her affliction which renders her thus strange. Alas! grief does indeed at times produce eccentric aberrations of the reason: and poor Clarine! she has not the same fortitude as myself in yielding to that which she so piteously described as a sad, sad destiny!"

"On quitting Zoe, Clarine proceeded as usual to M. Volney's study, to imprint the wonted kiss upon his brow and receive that nightly benediction which he never failed to give. Oh! how tumultuously did poor Clarine's heart beat as she approached that study-door!--with what a sense of anguish did she stop to press her hands against her heaving bosom, as if she could thereby silence the palpitations of that heart of her's!--how painfully for a few instants did she find herself compelled to lean against the wall for support. But it sometimes happens at all the very crisis of the most torturing ordeal preternatural fortitude suddenly seizes upon those who are to go through it,--nerving them with the requisite amount of courage. And thus was it now with Clarine. She regained a degree of outward composure which astonished

herself; and the next instant she stood in her father's presence.

"Sit down, Clarine," said M. Volney "I would speak to you a few words."

Fortunate for her was it that his countenance was half averted, and that he completely shaded his eyes with his hand as he thus spoke: for if he had only happened to glance towards her at the instant, he would have seen that all her composure suddenly vanished, and that she sank upon the seat as if overcome by a mortal terror.

"Clarine," continued M. Volney, "I have long wished to speak to you on a particular subject; and the few words which passed between us yesterday, more than ever impressed me with the necessity of so doing. You see that I am awakening to a sense of your lonely position, shut out as you are from that society in which at your age it is natural you should desire to mix—and indeed in which you *ought* to mix. Yes my poor child! I will henceforth endeavour to consider you more and myself less than I have hitherto done. You will not always have Lady Octavian Meredith with you: I dare say that she will soon become wearied of this monotonous mode of life——"

"On the contrary, my dear father," Clarine ventured softly to observe: "Lady Octavian loves this seclusion where she has found a home. As for myself——"

"I know that you are a good and obedient girl." Interrupted M. Volney somewhat hastily: "and it is that which——"

But he suddenly stopped short,—his countenance, still averted, his eyes still shaded by his hand. A deep but inaudible sigh slowly convulsed Clarine's bosom: for she comprehended only too well how her father would have finished his sentence if he had not caught back the words which had involuntarily risen to his lips. He would have said, "It is this that makes me show you whatsoever love and kindness you have ever known on my part!"

"Yes—you are a good and dutiful girl," continued M. Volney after a pause; and still he seemed as if he dared not turn his eyes towards Clarine. "And now listen to me attentively: listen also with that complying and obedient spirit which you have ever manifested towards me. I said yesterday that we are mortal that I am advanced in years,

and that in the ordinary course of nature my time must soon come. And then too there are accidents—a casualties—and it may likewise be Clarine," he continued, speaking in disjointed sentences, as if he were really much moved inwardly, though his voice was cold,— "and then too, Clarine, may enter into my plans to send you where you may mingle in that society where you ought to move——"

"But my dear father——"

"Do not interrupt me," he said waving his hand somewhat impatiently and then replacing that same hand before his eyes to shade them again: "Obey listen in silence. The injunction I have about to give you is one vitally necessary—and yet I cannot explain the reasons—nor must you ever seek to know them. It is true that accidents may some day wait them to your ear and if so——But no matter! Listen to my injunction! You cannot always remain a prisoner in this old Chateau Clarine: sooner or later you will go out to the great world—and there you will mingle amidst the busy throng. Let me hope, too, that your hand will be sought in marriage by some eligible suitor; for I have already told you, Clarine, that you will be rich at my death. Weep not—weep not, my poor girl!"

Thus speaking, M. Volney rose suddenly from his chair; and pressing his lips to Clarine's forehead, he smoothed down her hair for a few moments with his hand. He then resumed his seat, shading his countenance as before.

"Let me hasten," he said, "to conclude this scene, and to specify the injunction towards which I am so long in coming. It is this, Clarine—that there is one person in the world whom you must never suffer to approach you—one person with whom no friendly words must ever be exchanged by your lips; and if you felt that your heart could possibly love this one to whom I allude, pluck that heart out of you—kill yourself sooner——"

A cry thrilled from Clarine's lips; M. Volney started up from his seat; and the afflicted young lady exclaimed "O father! father!"

"Pardon me Clarine! I have been too abrupt—too vehement likewise! I have made use of language which is indeed but too well calculated to startle and horrify you, incomprehensible as it must be!"

Again M. Volney passed his hand caressingly over her hair: and in a tremulous voice he said, "Courage, Clarine—courage for only a few momental Bear with me—have patience! This is a scene which is necessary *now*—but which need never be renewed!"

Again did he return to his seat; and again did he shade his countenance with his hand.

"It is possible, Clarine," he continued, "that sooner or later in the great world you may meet an individual bearing the name of the Viscount Delorme."

Clarine gasped with anguish; but no audible sound came from her lips—yet her face was of a death-like pallor.

"It is this man," continued M. Volney, perfectly unconscious that Clarine had exhibited any fresh paroxysm of emotion,—"*it is this man whom you must avoid as if he were a mortal enemy. If I be living when you should thus happen to meet him,—supposing you ever do meet—recollect that it would fill my cup with misery to overflowing if you were to disobey me; and if I be dead, say to yourself that even from the tomb itself the spirit voice of him who had cherished you proclaims the existence of an eternal gulf between yourself and that same Viscount Delorme!*"

Having thus spoken, M. Volney remained for more than a minute with his looks averted and his hand shading his countenance. This gave Clarine leisure to compose her own agonized feelings somewhat; and it was once more with a preternatural fortitude, astonishing even herself, that she became armed.

"And now good night, Clarine—good night, my dear girl!" said M. Volney, at length rising from his seat, and once more imprinting a kiss upon the young lady's forehead.

"Good night, dearest father," she murmured; and the next moment the door closed behind her.

She sped up to her own chamber—she threw herself upon her knees—she buried her countenance with the bed-ding: she wept and sobbed convulsively. She called upon God to strengthen her; she gave vent to low but passionately uttered words of agony. It was sad—it was sad indeed, to think that one of her age, in the bloom of incipient womanhood, when the world ought to be stretching like a lovely garden full of flowers before her vision.—Oh! it was sad that she should experience such

utter desolation of the heart. And yet it was so. Alas poor Clarine!

But we must now return to Lady Octavian Meredith. Little suspecting what was passing between Clarine and her father, Zoe had retired to her own chamber. She felt not the slightest inclination to retire to rest; and she dismissed her maid for the night without beginning to disapparel herself. She sat down to reflect on all she had heard that day: she was mournful on her friend Clarine's account; and the thought of the sorrows of another sharpened instead of mitigated the recollection of her own. The wind was moaning dismally without; and these sounds were by no means calculated to cheer Lady Octavian's spirits. She remembered the circumstances which for two consecutive nights had alarmed her when crossing the passage; and she could not possibly repress the cold shudder of a superstitious awe.

Nearly half-an-hour had elapsed since Zoe sought her chamber—and she was still seated at her toilet-table without commencing the slightest preparation for retiring to rest. She was falling into a deeper and deeper reverie,—in which all that concerned herself, all that concerned Clarine, as well as the legends attached to the Chateau, were blended—yet in no confused and incomprehensible jumble. Presently the idea gradually began to steal into Lady Octavian's mind that strange sounds were being wafted to her ear,—sounds that were distinct from the dull dismal moaning of the wind—sounds which no current of air in its gush through the passage could possibly create. A feeling of terror crept over Lady Octavian: she listened with suspended breath. The sound were like the continuous moaning of human voice,—now swelling into louder strain of agony—then sinking in to the lowest and most plaintive wail. What could it be? She thought of Clarine. But no—impossible! The two chambers were separated by the old chapel, or oratory; and no notes of sorrow sounding in Clarine's room could be heard by Zoe in her own. Then what was it? She was now so excited by alarm that her feelings grew almost desperate: she could not endure this horrible state of suspense.

Starting up from her seat, Zoe seized the taper and was about to open the door

in the hasty violence of her excited feelings, when she suddenly recollected that it would not be so well to alarm others who were in the house. She was naturally courageous, and therefore considerate. She opened the door with the utmost gentleness—and looked forth into the passage. It was natural that her glances should be tremblingly and shudderingly cast in that direction where she had twice seen—or at least fancied she had seen the figure that had so much alarmed her: but now she beheld nothing. She advanced, treading noiselessly, and stopping at every instant to listen. She could now distinguish more distinctly than at first those sounds which had brought her forth from her chamber. Moaning and plaintive were they—now continuous and prolonged—then dying away—then gradually rising again, or else suddenly springing up from silence. The idea that it was a human voice grew fainter and fainter in the mind of Lady Octavian Meredith: but still she was utterly at a loss to comprehend what the source or cause of these sounds might be.

She had halted just in front of the folding-doors belonged to the oratory, or small chapel, intervening betwixt her own chamber and Clarine's; and she was convinced that the strange unaccountable sound came from within that chapel. She mechanically placed her hand upon the old-fashioned rusted latch of those doors: it yielded to her touch—and one of the leaves of the tall portals opened slightly. The gust of wind which issued forth, nearly extinguished Zoo's taper: but fortunately she just shaded the light in time to save it. She pushed the door further open: the sounds had now altogether ceased: but expecting that they would revive again, she was impelled by curiosity to enter the chapel. She found herself first of all in a little vestibule, in front of which hung a heavy curtain, whose material had once been a rich velvet: but the entire drapery was now so faded, so torn, and so tattered, that it was a more worthless rag. It seemed as if the hand of a chill might tear it down, so flimsy was it. It waved slowly to and fro with the wind which swept through the chapel; and now once more did those strange sounds reach the ear of Lady Octavian Meredith. It was evident that the wind wafted them; but still she was at a loss to conceive their source.

It was with a feeling bordering upon superstitious awe, that Zoo stretched forth her hand to part aside the curtain in order to enter the oratory. A scream was well nigh bursting from her lip when she beheld what appeared to be a couple of tall dark figures standing just within: but a second glance showed her that they were two suits of armour standing upright—one containing a lance in a perpendicular position—and both having a life-like appearance. These panoplies were in every respect perfect. The vizors of the helmets were closed, so that it was easy to fancy the human wearers were within those rusted steel suits. The helmets, too, were surmounted with plumes; and there was something ominous and awe-inspiring in the motionless attitude of those panoplies. Indeed for an instant Zoo could scarcely divest herself of the idea that they would either advance towards her, or that a voice would emanate from behind the barred aventails of the helmets.

Speedily recovering her self, possession Lady Octavian Meredith approached the suits of armour, and inspected them. She endeavoured to lift one of the closed vizors; but it resisted the force of her delicate hand,—doubtless because the nails forming the rivets on which it moved, were completely rusted in their settings. Turning away from these panoplies, Zoo advanced farther into the chapel. It bore all the evidences of neglect: the walls were covered with damp—the tall, slender, sculptured shafts which sustained the pointed roof, were green with mildew. Some of the windows were totally deficient in glass, and the wind swept through them. At the farther extremity was an organ, placed in a gallery: but the yellow red-like arrangement of the frontage was so dingy with collected dust, and perhaps with damp likewise, that the original vividness of its colouring could no longer be discerned. A dilapidated staircase led up towards the gallery: but the balustrade bronze, elaborately worked with beautiful devices, remained perfect, though utterly dimmed and disfigured by the encrusted rust. There were several large pictures suspended to the walls: the frames were ruined—the canvass was torn, or else had given way with the effects of time and neglect; and the subjects of the paintings were unrecognisable.

"It is possible that the second occurrence might thus have been the result of fancy," answered Zoe; "although in my own mind I can scarcely arrive at such a conviction. But that in the first instance it was quite otherwise, I can positively affirm, inasmuch as it was not until the following morning I became acquainted with the legend, when one of my maids was accidentally led to narrate it."

"I positively charged my daughter as well as the servants," said M. Volney, "not to make that legend the subject of their idle gossip in respect to either your ladyship or your own domestics: for though I had too high an opinion of *your* intellect, Lady Octavian, to imagine for a moment that such a tale would at all disturb your equanimity—yet I was less certain in respect to your maids. For the minds of those who are only partially educated, are more susceptible of the influence of superstitious terrors—"

"I will candidly inform you, M. Volney," said Zoe, "that it was the gardener who acquainted my maids with that legend: but I beseech you not to visit him with your displeasure."

"And you saw that form while as yet ignorant of the legend?" said M. Volney in a musing tone, and with a strange darkness of the looks. "Then I myself could not possibly have been deceived!"

"What mean you?" inquired Zoe, quickly, as well as anxiously.

"What appearance had the figure?" asked M. Volney, without heeding Lady Octavian's question.

"I saw it but dimly," rejoined her ladyship; "and whatever it might have been—I mean if it were some real living intruder—I could not conscientiously declare upon my oath in a Court of Justice that the description, as it was faintly impressed upon my mind, is the accurate one. But it certainly seemed to me to be the form of a tall man, of slender figure—*young* too. I should think—and apparelled in dark garments. My ear caught not the slightest sound of a footfall on either occasion; and thus, when after the first occurrence I heard that legend which represents how the unfortunate Lenoir is supposed to glide with his shoeless feet through the passages of this Chateau, I was certainly struck with a strange feeling."

"Yes—strange, most strange!" muttered M. Volney; and then he looked plexed.

"And you yourself," said Zoe, again in anxious inquiry, "have come round—"

"Your ladyship has been candid with me," interrupted the French gentleman; "I will be equally candid with you, listen, Lady Octavian! Never until this night was I in the faintest degree affected by that legend. Indeed, I have very rarely thought of it since the first day—some five years back. Oh! it was communicated to me. But to night it is different! I was ascending from my study to my own chamber, when I thought that at the end of a passage I beheld a form just as you have described it—and in exact correspondence with the unpoetical details of the legend. Not however that I perceived the countenance of that form: it was merely the figure itself; and it was gliding along noiselessly on its shoeless feet, as you yourself have just explained it. I was staggered: I thought it was an hallucination: I pressed my hand across my eyes, and when I looked again, the figure was gone. I proceeded to my chamber endeavouring to persuade myself that it was mere fancy on my part: but the idea haunted me. I repaired to the gardener's room, to assure myself that it could not have been that man then roaming stealthily about: I entered he was sleeping soundly: I retired without awakening him. Then it occurred to me that some evil-intentioned individual might have got into the Chateau. The night being windy and unusually black for the season of the year, I enveloped myself in my cloak—secured a brace of pistols about my person—and prepared to move forth to make the round of the premises. As you are perhaps aware, there is a staircase at each extremity of the gallery; and doors are at the bottom of those staircases. I descended the stairs of that extremity where I had seen the form: the door at the bottom was locked, as usual, but a general pass-key which I have about me at once opened it. I went forth: I made the circuit of the building: I could distinguish no signs of any burglarious entry. I returned by a private staircase opening into this chapel, and the door of which is just behind that farther suit of armour. You may conceive my astonishment on beholding your ladyship here."

Zoe had listened with the deepest attention to his narrative,—a narrative

which appeared most materially to confirm her own belief that which she had seen was very far from being a delusion. There was a silence of some minutes, during which both herself and M. Volney were buried in profound thought; but it was at length broken by that gentleman,—who said, “It is impossible, Lady Octavian, we can blind ourselves to the fact that we have indeed seen something. But it were useless to inspire others beneath this roof with any apprehensions. Such I have already ascertained to be your ladyship’s own considerate idea; and therefore I need not suggest that we keep silent of those points.”

Zoe readily gave M. Volney an assurance to a similar effect; and they separated. But when Lady Octavian once more found herself alone in her own chamber, she experienced a renewal of a superstitious terror, which despite all her efforts she could not cast off. At length, ashamed of herself she retired to rest: but when sleep stole upon her eyes, her dreams were haunted by the stealthily gliding form of the murdered Lenoir—by hideous shapes, uncouth and terrible—by suits of armour marching majestically before her mental vision, their plumes waving ominously above their helmets. And then, too, it appeared to her that the organ in the chapel was pouring forth its full tide of lugubrious and mournful harmony—swelling at length into a terrific volume of sound, which rolled its awful diapason through the entire building. When Zoe awoke, the light of the refulgent sun was streaming in at the windows: the wind had completely gone down: the heavens were clear and beautiful; and the climate of that Pyrenean region was as serene as warm, and as genial as Zoe had at first known it.

CHAPTER CIV.

THE PRECIPICE.

WHEN Lady Octavian Meredith met M. Volney and Clarine at the breakfast-table, she perceived that the countenance of the former was more pale, more haggard, and more care-worn than she had as yet seen it, and that Clarine’s cheeks had likewise lost their colour. She herself was pallid and much indisposed, through having passed so troubled

a night: there was little conversation—and no one asked the cause why the others were dull. Doubtless M. Volney fancied that the conversation which he had with his daughter in his study on the preceding evening, had affected her spirits: but Zoe attributed her friend’s mournfulness to her knowledge of all those mysteries which so intimately regarded her sire.

Immediately after breakfast, M. Volney quitted the room; and the ladies were left to themselves. Zoe at once proposed that they should go forth to walk: for she fancied that the fresh air and the cheerful aspect of nature would have a healthful influence over herself, and would tend to improve the spirits of her friend Clarine. Mademoiselle Volney at once assented: and they went forth together.

“Wherefore, my dear friend,” asked Lady Octavian, “do you not endeavour to surmount this melancholy which has taken possession of you? Believe me, dear Clarine, your father cannot fail shortly to perceive——”

“Zoe,” interrupted Mademoiselle Volney suddenly, and speaking as if with a strange wild gust of feeling, “you know——Oh, you know not how wretchedly unhappy I am!”

“I know it, my sweet friend,” responded Lady Octavian in a deeply compassionating tone; “and I need not assure you that you possess my warmest sympathy. But for your own sake, and that of your father——”

“O Zoe!” interrupted Clarine with passionate vehemence, “you do not understand me! If you only knew all!”

“Heavens! my dear friend,” said Lady Octavian; “is there anything that you have concealed from me? Yes—yes—I perceive it!—there is something more than what I already know, and that is making you thus miserable! Clarine,” continued Lady Octavian very seriously, “if there be aught in which you require the counsel of a friend, I beseech you to make me your confidante!”

“Yes—I will—I ought!” said Clarine, now sobbing violently, and for a few moments wringing her hands as if with frantic grief. “You know not half my wretchedness! All that you *do* know is surely enough to account for a world of misery; but my heart holds enough to fill the entire universe!”

“Good heavens! what words are these to come from your lips, Clarine?” said

Zoe. "You frighten—you terrify me! I beseech you to relieve me from this cruel suspense: for believe me—(Oh! believe me, Clarine, the friendship I entertain for you is as great as if we had known each other for years instead of weeks!"

Mademoiselle Volney had all at a sudden grown silent; she had a look of ineffable gratitude upon Lady Octavian Meredith then she took her hand, and pressed it to her bosom. They walked on for some minutes in silence—their hearts buried in profound reflection Lady Octavian burning to become acquainted with her beloved friend's source of anguish, yet not daring to put another question on the subject. They had walked in a direction which, when together, they had never happened to take before: it was on one of the slopes which gradually ascend into the magnificent anticlinal of the Pyrenees, and all of a sudden they came upon the brink of a deep yawning chasm.

"It was here!" shrieked forth Clarine, as abruptly catching her friend Zoe by the arm, she held her back.

Lady Octavian Meredith was far more startled with Clarine's tone and manner, than even by the fact of finding herself on the verge of that abyss: because there was a low paling fencing it, and therefore nothing so dangerous to prevent the instantaneous recovery of her presence of mind.

"What do you mean, my dear friend?" she asked: "what do you mean by saying that it was *here*?"

Clarine spoke not a word—but led the way towards a little knot of trees higher up the slope, and at about a distance of two hundred yards from the ravine on the escarped side of which they had so suddenly halted. Beneath the shade of those trees the ladies sat down; and Clarine looking towards the chasm, heaved a profound sigh and murmured, "It was there!"

Zoe said nothing, but looked anxiously in Mademoiselle Volney's face, at the same time pressing her hand to assure her in advance of whatsoever sympathy might properly be yielded to the tale of affliction she was about to tell. For that it *was* a tale of woe which was presently to issue from Mademoiselle Volney's lips, Zoe could not possibly doubt.

"Listen to me, my dear friend," said Clarine; "and I will tell you everything—yes, I will tell you everything! I will

relieve this burdened heart of mine. Although my life was so lonely here, it was so happy enough for several years because mine was *there*—a domesticity which could readily adapt itself to circumstances; and moreover it was sufficient for me that my father thought fit to settle our abiding place in the neighbourhood. My books, my books, and my consideration of other needle-work, proved to while away much of my time. It was very early indeed that my father invited me to walk out with him; and when I felt, carrying by myself, I was frequently in the habit of bringing with me a book which I would either read while walking along, or else I would rent myself in some shade like this to study. It proved extremely one day, a few months ago, my father said to me that he feared I must experience the monotonous loneliness of the life was leading; and he volunteered a promise to procure me some eligible female companionship. I was rejoiced at his kindness—but I must tell you that I was perfectly content to live in the way that he had suited his own tastes and habits. He nevertheless acquiesced his intention to adopt the means of affording me some little change of association. After this interview I reflected much on what my father had said, and I was pleased at the idea of my father that the very day following—Oh! how could I ever forget that day!—I do not its date indelibly given on my memory!"

Then Mademoiselle Volney paused for a few minutes, during which she reflected profoundly; and then she continued in the following strain:

"It was on the day after that conversation, as I have just said, that I came forth to take my usual exercise. I brought a book with me; and I roamed in this direction. The book that I brought was one I had purchased on the previous day in the village. It was Lamartine's *Jocelyn*—a beautiful poem, characterized by the most touching pathos as well as interspersed with description of mountain scenery that at times enchants and at others over-awe the soul. I became so deeply interested in the volume as I walked along, that I perceived not the frightful peril towards which I was advancing. All of a sudden—while my eyes were riveted upon the book, and I had no thought for anything besides its absorbing, riveting interest—I was startled by a loud cry warning me

of danger. But it was too late—or rather perhaps the cry itself accelerated the mischief which it strove to prevent: for bounding forwards with the sudden impression that some peril threatened me from behind, I fell over that precipice."

"Good heavens, Clarine!" ejaculated Lady Octavian, horrified at the bare idea.

"Yes—it is all too true!" continued Mademoiselle Volney. "I had advanced towards a spot where the railing was broken away; it had since been repaired I fell over: but the outstretching trunk of a tree growing forth from the side of the chasm, caught me about a dozen feet below the edge. You may conceive the wild terror that filled my brain on hanging over the trunk of that tree, I looked down into the fearful gulf, along the depths of which a stream was eddying and foaming. But succour was nigh. He whose well-meant warning had pealed upon my ear, lowered himself down by means of the roots growing out of the side of the precipice. I remember that as I looked up and saw him hanging above me, sustained only by those frail and uncertain means of support, the dizziness which had before prevailed in my brain amounted to a torturing frenzy. I did not immediately faint—but I have lost the recollection of the precise means that were adopted by my deliverer to save me, and himself too, from our perilous position. I however recollect that when at length safe on the firm land above, I fell into a swoon. On slowly coming back to consciousness, I found my deliverer hanging over me. When I told you, Zoo, that he is the handsomest of men—at least in my eyes—that he is gifted with a rare intelligence that his manners are fascinating—that his conversation has charms such as I never experienced before——"

"I understand you my sweet friend," murmured Zoo mournfully: for as it now proved to be a tale of love to which she was thus listening, she was most painfully reminded of that love of her's which had at first been her joy but had since proved the source of so much misery.

"Yes, I love him—love him passionately!" resumed Clarine, with a violent burst of feeling. "But I forgot—I am wandering from the continuous routine of my narrative! My deliverer knew who I was; he had been in this neighbourhood a day or two previous to the

adventure which thus threw us together: and I gathered from what he said that I had been pointed out to him. I could not find words to express my gratitude for the service he had rendered me at the peril of his own life: and I invited him to the Chateau that he might receive my father's thanks likewise. But he declined; and in the gentlest manner he counselled me not to inform my father of what had happened,—arguing that it was useless to distress him on account of a danger that was passed. I considered that one who had rescued me from destruction had a right to proffer his advice; and I promised to follow it. Besides, my thoughts were all in such confusion that I had not the power to deliberate calmly with myself. We parted—and on returning to the Chateau, I did my best to compose my troubled feelings. My father did not return home till the dinner-hour; he was wearied and ill—he had evidently been rambling far—and thus if I had experienced any inclination to act contrary to the advice of my unknown deliverer, my father's state of mind and body would have rendered me obedient to that well-meant advice. I therefore said nothing on the subject. For the next two or three days my father was confined to his bed; and to distress him under such circumstances with the revelation of my adventure, was now totally out of the question. I continued in attendance upon him; and when he was restored to health again, it was too late to mention the incident."

"Confess the truth, my dear Clarine," said Zoo, with a sweet melancholy smile: "that handsome stranger had on the very first occasion obtained more or less influence over your heart as well as over your mind?"

"It is true—I believe that it is true," responded Clarine: "for his image was constantly in my thoughts—so that even when by myself, I would blush at the idea of so inexcusably thinking of the handsome countenance which I had seen bending over me when recovering from my state of unconsciousness after my rescue from that frightful peril. Nevertheless solemnly do I assure you that when next I walked out again after my father's recovery, I had not the slightest expectation of meeting my handsome unknown deliverer. And yet we met. It was in quite a different direction from where we first encountered each

other—two miles away from this spot which is so close by the scene of my peril and my deliverance. He approached me in a manner in which kindness and courtesy were blended, as if he felt that circumstances had placed us on a friendly footing. Almost his very first question was whether I had followed his advice in respect to my father?—and I answered that I had. We walked together for about half an hour,—the time flying so quickly that it appeared to me as if we had only been a few brief minutes together. When we were about to separate, he delicately hinted that I ought not now to mention our acquaintance to my father; for that if I did, I must necessarily explain how it commenced, and then he would chide me for having kept the matter secret at all. I have said that my deliverer spoke with utmost delicacy of language; and it was also with a mingled entreasy and diffidence in his tone but nevertheless a pang shot through my heart—I felt hurt—I should even have been indignant, were it not that I remembered that I owed my life to him, and that he had as magnanimously perilled his own to save it. He saw what was passing in my mind: he even looked pleased—he seized my hand—he said that he comprehended the natural delicacy of my thoughts and my sense of propriety—he implored me not to be incensed against him, for that he would explain his meaning and his object in beseeching me to keep the seal of silence upon my lips: I asked for that explanation at once: he wished to postpone it until the morrow. I then said to him, as nearly as I can recollect the following words:—“You have saved my life, Sir, and you have every claim upon my gratitude. Of that gratitude I have the liveliest sense; but my own idea of propriety must not be absorbed therein—nor the duty that I owe towards my father. If you purpose to remain in this neighbourhood, and we stand a chance of meeting again, I must assuredly mention to my father the acquaintance which I have had the honour to form.”—It was thus that I spoke.”

“And you spoke wisely and well!” exclaimed Zoe, in a tone of enthusiasm. “I am delighted to hear that such was your conduct, Clarine. It was dignified and becoming, without the slightest sacrifice of that gratitude which you owed to the saviour of your life.”

“Yes—it was thus I spoke,” said Mademoiselle Volney; “and my deliverer looked distressed. He paced to and fro on the spot where we had halted; I began to be alarmed that I had fallen in with some unworthy character, especially as I now recollected that he had not even mentioned his name nor where he was living, nor what business had brought him into that neighbourhood.—‘Do you,’ he at length said, ‘insist upon knowing who I am?’—‘I do,’ I answered, ‘if there be any chance of our meeting again.’—Then he told me a tale of how he had been engaged in a political conspiracy—how he had been obliged to flee from Paris—and how he had sought this distant and secluded neighbourhood in the hope that he might dwell unrecognized here for a few weeks while his influential friends in the capital exerted all their interest to hush up the matter. He added that he was personally known to my father, whom he had seen at Fontainebleau a few years back when he was a youth; and that therefore if he now presented himself to my sight, the latter would be endangering his own safety by not surrendering him up to justice. Finally he informed me that his name was Claude Masson; that he was a gentleman of wealth and excellent family; that he had no doubt his friends would shortly succeed in smoothing down the temporary difficulties which beset his path; and he therefore threw himself completely on my mercy.”

“And what response did you make my dear Clarine?” inquired Zoe.

“I at once assured him,” replied Mademoiselle Volney, “that not for worlds would I do aught that should injure a hair of his head; that therefore I would keep profoundly secret his presence in the neighbourhood, as well as all he had just been telling me; but that inasmuch as I must of necessity under circumstances, remain silent even to my own father, it would be the height of impropriety on my part to converse with M. Claude Masson again. Such were the terms in which I spoke; and then, with a salutation which I afterwards fancied to have been too coldly distant towards one who had saved my life, I hastened away. Some day passed; and I purposely avoided going out for fear of meeting M. Masson. And yet, dear Zoe—But you will blame me for my weakness—And yet, I say, in my heart, did I long to behold him

again! Can you understand these contradictory sentiments? I feared, yet I longed—I dreaded, yet I wished—I trembled, yet I hoped!”

“Yes, my sweet friend,” said Zoo, in a soft murmuring voice; “I can understand you—Oh! I can understand you! You loved—and love in a sentiment compounded of a thousand contradictions: it is the eccentricity of the soul, as other strange fantastic ways are the eccentricities of the disposition or the manner. How often, when one loves, is the duty opposed to the inclination!—how often does a sense of delicacy and propriety urge in one direction and the heart’s tendency in another! But pray proceed my sweet Clarine—and tell me how progressed this love-affair—for a love-affair it assuredly is!”

“Several days passed, as I just now said,” continued Mademoiselle Volney “and my rambles had been confined to the garden belonging to the Chateau. At length one morning, immediately after breakfast, my father gave me a bank-note for a thousand francs—which, as you know, is forty pounds sterling of your English money—and he asked me to proceed to the village and pay one or two little bills which had just been sent in. I accordingly set out: I reached the village—and I subsequently remembered that on the outskirts I took a few pence from my reticule to give to a poor woman who implored alms. Then I hastened on, and reached the first shop to which my errand led me; but on thrusting my hand into the reticule, I found that the bank-note was lost. I sped back to the spot where I had encountered the poor woman: but she was no longer there—nor was the bank-note anywhere to be seen. I was sorely distressed: for at that time I believed that my father had really lost his property, and that his means were very limited: I therefore fancied that this would be a very serious loss for him. Besides, I feared that he would charge me with negligence; and altogether I was much afflicted. Suddenly I looked up on hearing a footstep approach: Claude Masson stood before me. I was seized with confusion. In a voice of gentle melancholy—as if pleading for permission to address me—he inquired the cause of my tribulation. I scarcely know in what hurried or bewildered words I explained the occurrence.—‘The wind,’ he exclaimed, ‘blows to this side of the

road; and you Mademoiselle, seem to have been searching on the other.’—Then he hastened in the direction which he had indicated; and suddenly returning towards me, he said, ‘Behold the note, I will not avail myself of the little service I thus render you, to intrude any longer on your presence.’—Thus speaking, he hastened away. I felt pained and grieved at the abruptness of his flight: I blamed myself for having spoken too severely to him when last we met: I began to fancy that my conduct was altogether tinged with ingratitude. I sighed profoundly; and again to confess the truth, dear Zoe, I wished that he had remained. However, I held in my hand the bank-note; and I proceeded to execute the commission entrusted to me by my father. But as I was issuing from one of the shops, I was accosted by the poor woman whom I had previously relieved; and she inquired if I had lost anything? I asked her what she meant: she repeated the question:—a strange idea struck me: it was accompanied by a sensation as if I were experiencing a sudden fright. In terms as confused as those in which I had ere now spoken to Claude Masson, I faltered out something about bank-note for a thousand francs. The poor but honest woman at once presented me with the note I had lost, and which I immediately perceived to be slightly of a different colour from that which M. Masson had placed in my hand. I cannot describe the feeling which seized upon me as I took that note; and it was not until I had observed that the poor woman began to regard me somewhat suspiciously, that I regained my self-possession. Then I placed a liberal reward in her hand—and hurried away. I was struck by the generosity of Claude Masson’s conduct—a generosity too that was blended with so much delicacy: for little, doubtless, had he anticipated that the real note which was lost would ever be restored to my hand. But, Oh! to think that I now lay under a pecuniary obligation to him! It would have been humiliating, were it not that there was something in the way in which the transaction took place that prevented me from feeling my pride to be humbled. And, after all, I could restore him the note! But I knew not where he lived; and I dared not—for my promise’ sake, and with due regard to Claude’s safety—name the incident to my father. What

was I to do? I must meet him once again: nay more—I must purposely throw myself in his way: I must seek an opportunity to encounter him. And I did so. For three or four days I ramblod everywhere about the neighbourhood—but without seeing him. At length one afternoon, we suddenly met at the angle of yonder grove which you see, my dear Zoe about half a mile to the right of the village-church. I had flattered myself that I should have been enabled to address him with calmness and fortitude: but now that the instant for putting me the test had come, all my self-possession abandoned me. I was full of confusion. Claude Mason took my hand and gazed earnestly upon my countenance.—‘Little as we are acquainted,’ he said, in a voice that was soft and low ‘I feel as if I had known you for many, many long years.’ For a few instants I had abandoned him my hand, unconscious of what I was doing: I now snatched it away: but I was trembling violently. Then—more instinctively than because I actually remembered the object for which I had sought this meeting—I drew forth the bank-note and proffered it to him. He started—he blushed—he saw that his generous stratagem had been discovered. I faltered out words of thanks:—how could I do otherwise? and I know not how it was but I presently found myself seated by his side on the bank that skirts the grove, and listening to the language of love which he was breathing in my ear. He told me that he had seen me every day since last we met—that he had followed me at a distance, content to obtain a glimpse of my form—and that he had taken care I should not perceive I was thus followed. Oh, all the tender things he said to me—yet in language so delicate—in terms so replete with an honest manly frankness, that it was impossible I could feel offended! But all the time my brain was in a sort of whirl; and I had no power of calm deliberation. I know not how we parted.—‘Yes,’ added Clarine, bending down her blushing countenance,” ‘I remember that when he besought and implored me to be there at the same hour on the following day, I did not refuse him—I suffered him to understand that his request would be granted. It was not until I was again at the Chateau, and in mine own chamber, that I had a right comprehension

of everything that had taken place. Then—I must candidly confess the truth—whatever regrets I might have experienced at the course I was pursuing unknown to my father, were absorbed in the delicious pangs of loving and being beloved. You see, Zoe, that I am telling you everything—I am speaking with frankness and candour—I am acknowledging myself completely unto you. Oh! do you not think I was very weak—?”

“Proceed, dear Clarine,” said Lady Octavian; “proceed—and let me hear the result.”

“After that meeting,” resumed Madeleine Volney, “we met frequently; yet on each occasion I thought to myself that I was doing wrong—very wrong! But, that love—exercised its spell-like influence over me; and I could not command the courage which was requisite for saying the word that was to pronounce our separation. And then too, my dear Zoe, I must not forget to observe that Claude Mason was constantly pressing me the time would soon come when concealment and disguise would be no longer necessary: when he would be enabled openly to proclaim his presence in that district and make himself known to my father—and that then he would reveal his love for me and claim my hand. You see, dear Zoe, it was a delicious dream in which I was cradled—a state of existence so different from that which I had been lately leading—no now to me, that to have returned to the monotony and the solitude of my former mode of life, would have been the destruction of my happiness; it would have been suicidal in respect to my own heart. Three weeks passed away—.”

“And where did Claude Mason live all this while?” inquired Lady Octavian Meredith.

“At a cottage about four miles distant—at least so he informed me,” answered Clarine. “Ah! you may conceive the precautions which he constantly took to avoid meeting my father or any one who might chance to know him! And I too had to take precautions in joining him at our trysting-places: but these were not so very difficult—my father never asked me whither I was going nor where I had been: he seemed to take note of my actions. And sometimes, dear Zoe, when I reflected on all this, I thought to myself

that my father was placing illimitable confidence in me, and that I was betraying it. But then, on the other hand, I persuaded myself that this very confidence on my father's part was as much as to abandon me to the discretionary power of entering for my own happiness. I have no doubt that you look upon such an idea as the most miserable sophistry on my part: but if the love which I experience be the same as the love which is felt by others, I am convinced that it is in the very nature of love itself to suggest expedients and even conjure up arguments that are in precise accordance with its own aims, views, or circumstances."

"This is true, Clarine," said Lady Octavian; "the voice of nature speaks a common and universal language through the medium of the heart's love."

"One day," continued Clarine, "my father told me that you would probably become my companion for a while; and to confess the truth I was at first more vexed than pleased: though I did my best to appear grateful to my parent and to seem satisfied at the arrangement that he was making with the best of motives on my behalf. I was told that you were an invalid: I thought therefore that you would be much in your own chamber, and that I should still find leisure to meet him who had become so dear to me. You arrived at the Chateau; and I immediately conceived a friendship for you—a friendship which has ripened into love. Yes, dear Zoe—"

At this instant, Mademoiselle Volney stopped short; and Lady Octavian Meredith instantaneously comprehended wherefore: for M. Volney was approaching from the distance.

"He means to assist us," said Clarine after a few instant's pause. "I must compose myself—Another time I will finish my narrative."

CHAPTER CV.

THE GALLERY IN THE CHATEAU.

M. VOLNEY approached his daughter and Lady Octavian; and he offered to escort them either for a continuation of their walk, or back to the Chateau. Zoe, to whom the choice was especially addressed, decided upon the latter: for she was fearful of rambling too far. During the walk homeward, it was

evident that M. Volney strove to converse in a *gayer* strain than heretofore, and that he sought to make up by present attentions for any remissness on that score of which he had been previously guilty.

On arriving at the Chateau, M. Volney did not instantaneously repair to his study: but he remained in the drawing-room to converse with his daughter and Zoe. He asked them to play upon the piano—he spoke with an unusual degree of tender kindness to Clarine—he was evidently striving also to render himself sociable to Zoe. There could be little doubt that this was the result of a resolve which he had adopted, and which must have arisen from the reflection that it was his duty to sacrifice his own feelings somewhat for the sake of others. Besides, he had promised Clarine that in future he should think less of himself and more of her than he had previously done. In the afternoon the worthy village-priest called; and on being asked to stay to dinner, he accepted the invitation. He did not take his departure until ten o'clock in the evening: the usual period for retiring to rest soon afterwards arrived: and thus the ladies had as yet found no opportunity of renewing that discourse which had been interrupted in the morning.

But now that Clarine had determined to make a confidante of Lady Octavian Meredith, she experienced an anxious yearning to complete the narrative which she had commenced and to place her friend in full possession of all the circumstances which regarded her love and him who was its object. Therefore, so soon as M. Volney had retired, Clarine said to Lady Octavian, "If you do not feel any particular inclination to seek your couch immediately, come to my chamber, dear Zoe, for half-an-hour; and I will conclude the history which my father's presence interrupted in the morning."

Zoe at once signified her readiness to comply with this request, which was indeed quite in accordance with the promptings of her own curiosity; and she added "I will first dismiss my maid for the night, and in a few minutes I will join you in your chamber."

The ladies now temporarily separated,—repairing to their own rooms, Zoe dispensed with the attendance of

the maid whose turn it was to minister unto her; and shortly after the abigail had retired, she issued forth from her chamber. At that very instant she beheld a form—the form of a man—emerge from the door of the oratorio; and at this sudden apparition a cry of terror thrilled from Lady Octavian's lips. She staggered as if about to fall; the individual whose presence had thus startled her, and who for a single instant had stood utterly irresolute how to act, bounded forward and caught her in his arms.

"For heaven's sake, compose yourself," he said in the low quick voice of intensest anxiety. "Compose yourself, I beseech you!"

At that moment Clarine rushed forth from her chamber; and clasping her hands in wild terror, she said in a hasty excited whisper, "Oh, this imprudence—this madness, after all that I have written to you!"

But now another door opened higher up the passage, and M. Volney hurried forth with a light in his hand. A piercing shriek burst from the lips of Clarine—and she fell senseless upon the floor. Zoo—now completely recovered from her own alarm—sprang forward to raise her friend up but she was anticipated by the stranger who had emerged from the chapel—though a stranger we can scarcely call him, inasmuch as Zoo had by this time conjectured that he could be none other than Claude Manson. And who but he could have so tenderly raised up the inanimate form of Mademoiselle Volney?—who but he could have gazed with such deep anxiety on her marble countenance, and then flung such deprecating, entreating looks towards her father?

But what words can depict the ghastly horror which the countenance of M. Volney himself displayed as he stopped short just outside the threshold of his own chamber? As if transfixed to the spot, he gazed in frightful consternation upon this scene. The light which he held in his hand, appeared to be illuminating the features of a corpse, so deadly pale was he—so ashy white were his lips. Zoo horrified, at the same time that she was too much bewildered for deliberate reflection.

All of a sudden it appeared as if Volney recovered his self-possession for his advanced slowly towards the spot in front of the chapel doors; and he said with a stern voice, "What means this intrusion here?"

"Let the truth be told—yea, let it be proclaimed at once!" cried he who was supporting in his arms the still inanimate form of Clarine. "I love you daughter, M. Volney. I adore her! She loves me in return! For heaven's sake let your animosity cease towards me!"

"She loves you?" exclaimed M. Volney, with a sort of terrific cry that his wildness, horror, and mournfulness lent its accents. "Wretched Clarine! wretched Deforme!"—and springing forward, he tore his daughter, as if frantically, from the Viscount's embrace.

What a revelation had just been made to Lady Octavian Meredith's ear! Claude Manson was none other than the Viscount Deforme; and how much that was hitherto mysterious was now suddenly cleared up! For Clarine's lover was tall, slender, and symmetrically formed; a glance showed Zoo that over his boots he wore a pair of those flat shoes which are common amongst the French peasantry; and hence the noiselessness of his steps as he had seen him pass along the corridor; for that it was he whom appearance had so much alarmed her, she had not now the slightest doubt.

We have said that M. Volney tore his inanimate daughter with frenzied violence from the arms of the Viscount Deforme; and the anguished father was bearing her towards her own chamber, when the young nobleman sprang forward, and catching him by the arm, exclaimed in a quick excited tone, "I know what is uppermost in your mind—but by heaven! you are wrong—and I can prove it!"

Clarine now suddenly regained her senses. For a moment her eyes swept their looks wildly around; but instantaneously comprehending everything that had passed, she threw herself at her father's feet, stretching her clasped hands towards him, and crying, "Pardon! pardon!"

M. Volney pressed his hand in anguish to his brow; and Zoo even fancied that a sob came from his lips.

"Yes—by her side do I kneel," said the Viscount Delorme: "by the side of this beloved one do I place myself—likewise to implore your pardon!"

"Rise—rise!" exclaimed M. Volney: "rise, I command—I entreat you! And follow me hither.—Lady Octavian," he added, perceiving that Zoe was about to retire to her own chamber from motives of delicacy, "have the goodness to accompany us: for as you have seen so much, you may be a witness of all the rest!"

M. Volney led the way into the drawing-room, followed by the Viscount and Clarine; while Zoe, after a few instants' hesitation, entered likewise. Clarine now threw herself in Lady Octavian's arms, and wept convulsively upon her bosom.

"M. Volney," said Alfred Delorme, hastening forwards and addressing Clarine's father in a low but quick and earnest voice, "I beseech you to give utterance to the word—the one word of consent—which may spare your daughter so much misery! Say it, sir, I entreat you! The horrible suspicion you entertained is wholly unfounded—and I repeat I can prove it!"

"Prove it? It is impossible!" said M. Volney, trembling all over with a deep concentrated excitement. "But even if you *could*, there are reasons—reasons——" and he gasped for breath.

"No, no, M. Volney," exclaimed Alfred: "you will not be implacable towards the son for his father's crimes! As for the proof, it is here—I have it—Pardon me for showing you a document only too well calculated to renew the affliction and the bitterness of past miseries! But it is absolutely necessary you should so far control your feelings as to peruse this letter."

Thus speaking, the Viscount Delorme handed M. Volney a paper which he had hastily drawn forth from a pocket-book; and then he turned towards Clarine who was now regaining some little command over her own feelings—thanks to the kind and encouraging words that Zoe was murmuring in her ears.

"Oh, Alfred! dearest Alfred!" whispered Clarine to her lover; "how could you possibly have been guilty of this imprudence after the letter which I wrote you declaring that we must separate for ever?"

"And think you that I could consent thus to separate?" responded the Viscount, in that low voice of tenderness which likewise being half-reproachful, was sufficient to convince Zoe of the depth and sincerity of the love that he entertained for her friend Clarine. "Why did I again seek an interview with you? It was to assure you of the existence of a proof that your father's fearful suspicion is utterly unfounded—and that proof is now in the hands of M. Volney. Behold—he is reading it!"

M. Volney had his back turned towards his daughter, the Viscount, and Zoe; he was bending down towards the chamber-light which he had placed upon the drawing-room table: he was holding the open letter in his hand: but whatsoever feelings might be depicted upon his countenance, could not be discerned by those from whom that countenance was thus averted. Zoe comprehended full well that the letter which the Viscount Delorme had placed in M. Volney's hands, contained some proof that he might with certainty regard Clarine as his own daughter and not the offspring of her mother's illicit amour with the late Viscount. She comprehended likewise that a proper delicacy of feeling had prevented Alfred Delorme from being more explicit in his whispered assurance to Clarine relative to the precise nature of that document.

"God be at least thanked for *this*!" was the ejaculation which suddenly burst from M. Volney's lips; and hastening towards Clarine, he folded her in his arms.

The young lady—perfectly well comprehending that her father was convinced by the weight of the evidence, whatsoever it were, that the letter contained—wound her arms about his neck and sobbed and wept upon his breast. But she sobbed and wept for joy at the thought that the hideous suspicion which her sire had entertained in respect to herself, was cleared up, and that he could now indeed embrace her with the confidence that it was his own lawfully-begotten child whom he was thus folding in his arms. Some words murmuringly uttered came from Clarine's lips; and as they struck her father's ear, they were to him a revelation.

"What! Clarine," he exclaimed; "you comprehend the meaning of all this? You know what suspicion——"

"Yes—I know it, dear father!" murmured his daughter; "I know more than you fancy—and I know everything!"

"Everything?" ejaculated M. Volney with a sudden start, and also with a frightened look sweeping over his countenance. "No, no! it is impossible! Heaven forbid!"—and he shuddered visibly.

"Forgive me, dearest father," said Clarine; and once more she sank upon her knees at his feet.

"What—what is it that you know?" he demanded; and there was something almost fierce in his accents, his looks, and his manner: "what is it that you know? But I am mad—it is impossible!"—and pressing his hand, with a renewal of wild anguish, to his brow, he seemed as if he sought to steady his confused and bewildered ideas.

"I know, dearest father," responded Clarine, frightened by the vehemence of his manner, "the source of all your distresses—And, Oh! bitterly, bitterly have I wept on account of the fall of her whose memory I had tutored myself to love and revere!"

"And who told you all this?" demanded M. Volney abruptly.

"It was the Viscount who told me part, and Marguerite who told me the rest. Oh! blame me not, dearest father," continued Clarine entreatingly; "I feel that I have done wrong in some respects—but if you had not left me so much to myself—"

"Rise child—rise!" said M. Volney, whose heart was evidently lacerated with a world of conflicting and tumultuous emotions. "It is I who am to blame!—it is I—and not you, my poor child!"

Clarine rose from her suppliant posture: Alfred Delorme stepped forward and said, "M. Volney, will you not now speak that one word of assent which will make us both happy? I have always heard you spoken of as a just, a good, and an upright man—"

"Enough!" interrupted M. Volney with a renewed fierceness of tone and look. "This scene can last no longer—at least not for the present! Depart, Alfred Delorme—and to-morrow you shall know my decision! Depart, I say!" added M. Volney vehemently; "not another word to me nor to my daughter!—and to-morrow, I repeat, you may come to me—Yes, you may call at the

Chateau—and then my decision shall be made known!"

"Oh! let me entreat you," said the Viscount in a voice of the most earnest appeal "to stifle those feelings of hatred which you have hitherto entertained towards me—"

"Young men, you comprehend me not!" interrupted Clarine's father petulantly: "you cannot penetrate into the depths of my heart! Oh, if you could—But enough! You will perhaps know more to-morrow. Depart—I conjure, I command you!"

"It is not for me," responded the Viscount, "who am an honourable suitor for your daughter's hand—aye, and a suppliant for your consent and good feeling—it is not for me, I say, to oppose your will or rebel against your mandate."

With these words Alfred Delorme bowed with courteous respect to M. Volney: he saluted Zoo in a similar manner: he bent a look of loving tenderness on Clarine; and he quitted the room. For some minutes after his departure, M. Volney paced to and fro with agitated steps,—apparently unconscious of the presence of his daughter and Zoo. These two remained together—Clarine with her arm thrown round her friend's waist—clinging to her with the confidence of one who sought support, solace, and encouragement in the painful state of uncertainty in which the last scene of this strangely wild drama had left her.

At length M. Volney accosted the two ladies; and he said to Clarine, "Sit down, and tell me frankly and faithfully everything that has taken place between yourself and the Viscount—all that you have heard from his lips—all that you have heard from the lips of old Marguerite likewise. Stay, Lady Octavian!—I beseech you not to leave us! We look upon you as something more than a friend: my daughter regards you as a sister—and if it be not forcing our affairs upon your attention—"

"Rest assured, M. Volney," replied Lady Octavian Meredith, "that if I were about to quit the room, it was only through motives of delicacy. But if, on the other hand, I can be of the slightest service—"

"You can! you can!" interjected M. Volney, with hasty emphasis.

"Perhaps it may be as well to mention," said Zoo, "that I am already

partially the confidante of my friend Clarine. This very morning was she telling me the history of her acquaintance and her love for him whom she then mentioned as Claude Masson, and whom I have this evening for the first time known to be the Viscount Deforme."

"And you will have known everything dearest Zoe," said Clarine gently, "had we not been interrupted. But, my dear father," she continued turning towards her parent, "with all frankness will I now reveal everything that has taken place. Yet you will chide me——"

"No, I will not chide you, Clarine," said M. Volney: "for there was only too much truth in your words when you declared that I had left you so continuously to your own pursuits."

"Think not for an instant that I intended it in a reproach!" exclaimed Clarine earnestly.

"No, no—I took it not as such," answered M. Volney with kindness: "it was the ingenuous ploy on your own behalf which would naturally flow from your lips under such circumstances."

Having thus spoken, M. Volney sat down with the air of one who intended to listen patiently to a narrative which he had asked for. Clarine and Zoe likewise seated themselves; and then the former commenced her explanations. She recited everything she had already stated to Lady Octavian in respect to the incidents which had first thrown her in the way of him who had passed himself off as Claude Masson; and she then continued the thread of her history in the following manner:—

"You, my dear Zoe, arrived at the Chateau some few weeks back: and we speedily became intimate together. You were the companion of my walks: there was no opportunity for me any longer to meet him whom I loved. During this interruption of my intercourse with him, the idea would often steal into my mind that it was perhaps all for the best—and that heaven itself had sent you hither to check me in a career of imprudence with regard to myself and of deceit towards my father. Nevertheless, even while making these reflections, I felt that I loved Claude Masson—as I then believed his name to be—with an affection that could never change; and I consoled myself with the hope that as he loved me with an equal sincerity, he would fulfil his promise of revealing himself to

you, my father, the moment the influential friends of whom he had spoken should have rescued him from the perils which he represented as envying himself. One day—when you, dear Zoe, were somewhat indisposed—I repaired to the village to make certain purchases; and on my way homeward I encountered him who was indeed uppermost in my thoughts at the time. Three weeks had passed since last we met: and though I explained to him the cause——indeed, he was already aware of it, for he had seen you and me, Zoe, walking together in the neighbourhood——yet did he somewhat reproach me for what he termed my unwillingness to make an effort to steal forth and meet him at least once during that interval. I was profoundly affected by the language which he thus held towards me; and he implored my forgiveness for having wounded my feelings. He said that in a short time he should be in a position to throw off the mask of concealment and openly come forward to claim my hand. He besought that I would now and then grant him an interview. It was in vain that I urged the impossibility of walking forth by myself, now that I had a companion. He was deeply distressed: he spoke despondingly: he declared that such was his affection for me, that he could not endure another long interval of separation. In a word, dear father——but you have promised not to chide me?—for oh! the Viscount is the most loving, the most high minded, and the most honourable of men——"

"I will not chide you, Clarine," said M. Volney with exceeding gentleness of manner. "Proceed. Shall I help you to that avowal which you hesitate to make?"

"No, father," responded Clarine, almost proudly. "Heaven be thanked! I can look you in the face and declare that——"

"Enough Clarine!" interrupted M. Volney: and then he emphatically added, "Not for a single instant did I suspect the honour or purity of my child. Proceed, Clarine. You consented to grant your admirer an occasional interview within the walls of this Chateau?"

"Yes—in the chapel," responded Clarine. "I furnished him with the key of the door at the bottom of the staircase at the extremity of the passage;

and on four or five occasions did I meet him for a few minutes in the chapel. Rest assured that I should not have for an instant granted these stolen interviews within the sanctity of your dwelling—nor at such an hour, after the household had retired to rest—no, not even in compliance with his earnest pleadings should I have granted these interviews—were it not that I was deeply, deeply anxious to learn the progress of those intercessions which his friends, as I believed at the time, were making on his behalf in Paris. I now come to a very memorable moment of my existence. It was the evening before last that I again met Claude Masson, as I still believed him name to be—in the chapel. He told me that he began to fear our interviews could no longer be snatched thus stealthily—for that he had seen you, dear Zoe, crossing the passage on the previous night as he was hastening towards the staircase at the extremity. He then asked me if I were prepared for a revelation which he was resolved to make, and which could no longer be withheld? I was frightened; I besought him to be candid with me at once. He then said that he must tell me a narrative of the past; of which, as he had discovered, I was hitherto completely ignorant. Without immediately revealing himself, he told me how a certain Viscount Delorme had proved the author of your wretchedness, my dear father—

"Yes, yes," interrupted M. Volney, with an anguished look; "I can understand full well all that he told you!"

"And then he concluded," added Clarine, herself deeply afflicted at being compelled to make allusions which thus planted fresh daggers in her parent's heart—"and then he concluded by revealing himself to me as Alfred Delorme!"

There was a brief pause—during which M. Volney guarded a profound silence; and Clarine then resumed her narrative in the following manner—

"Alfred explained to me all the motives of his recent conduct. He said that some five or six years ago he called privately upon you, my dear father, at Fontainebleau, to make you acquainted with the elucidation of the mystery which had previously shrouded his own father's fate; and at the same time he entertained the hope that as so terrible a retribution had overtaken the author of

your wrongs, amidst the drifting snows of the Alpine regions, you would not refuse to give your hand in forgiveness, if not in friendship, to him as the living representative of the perished Viscount. But you *did* refuse!—and Alfred left you with sadness and sorrow in his heart. A few years passed away—during which he travelled in foreign countries; and after a while he visited Spain. He took it into his head to perform a pedestrian tour across the Pyrenees and through the South of France. It was while thus engaged that he arrived a few months back in the neighbourhood. Observing the old Chateau, his curiosity dictated certain inquiries; and he learnt to his astonishment that it was inhabited by a gentleman named Volney, and who had a only daughter. He therefore at once felt convinced that the present tenor of the Chateau must be yourself. If wandered in the vicinity of the house he caught a glimpse of you in the distance—he beheld me likewise. Often and often," continued the blushing Clarine, "has he breathed the assurance in my ear that the first moment he saw me, he was smitten with a feeling which has since ripened into love. Accident rendered him my deliverer at the precipice of the ravine, as I have already told you; and from that instant he resolved to win me as his future bride. But he dared not *then* reveal himself to you: he thought that if his love were reciprocated, and if he could win my heart, you would not stand in the way of your daughter's happiness. He saw the necessity of devising some tale to account for his earnestly expressed desire that I should remain silent in respect to the presence of such an individual in the neighbourhood; and therefore, when I pressed him to declare who he was, he adopted the first name which entered his head at the moment. The story of his political perils was a venial fabrication to suit his purpose for the time, to allay my suspicions, and to satisfy my mind. Such were the explanations which the Viscount Delorme gave me the night before last, when I met him in the chapel. You may conceive the feelings with which I listened to all that he then told me; but before I had time to learn what his intentions were, and how he meant to proceed towards yourself, dear father,—the door of the chapel opened and Marguerite

made her appearance! I may as well observe, in order to avoid the interruption of my narrative hereafter, that Marguerite (as I learnt that same night, for I knew it not before) was in the habit of occasionally visiting the chapel to say her prayers; for, as you are aware, dear father, her piety borders upon superstition."

"And Marguerite thus surprised you," said M. Volney, "with Alfred Delorme?"

"Yes; and she was more than astonished—she was more than startled: she was horrified!" continued Clarine. "She insisted that the Viscount should at once take his departure. Vainly did he entreat, plead, and remonstrate: Marguerite was resolute; and she vowed that if he departed not at once, she would unhesitatingly make known his presence to you. All the favour that he could obtain was a permission to return on the following evening to explain those intentions which he was about to make known to me at the instant Marguerite so unexpectedly appeared. He went away; and I was left alone with Marguerite. She then began to upbraid me bitterly for what she termed the wickedness of my conduct. I besought her not to speak so harshly: the tears were streaming down my cheeks: she relented—and she embraced me. But she bade me discard the image of Alfred Delorme from my heart: she told me it was criminal to love him—for that you, my dear father, entertained the horrible suspicion——But I will not more directly allude to it! Suffice it to say that I myself was horrified. I consented—yes, willingly consented to abide by the dictates of Marguerite's guidance; and she bade me pen a letter to Alfred Delorme, to the effect that everything must be considered to be at an end between us. On this condition—and on this condition only—would she agree to place upon her lips the seal of silence in respect to what had occurred. I penned that letter—yesterday morning I gave it to Marguerite; and last night she left it in the chapel, so that when Alfred Delorme should penetrate thither he might find it. She herself chose not to have an interview with him: she deemed it useless to learn what *had been* his intentions, inasmuch as she felt the impossibility of their being carried out."

"And it was after all Alfred Delorme," said M. Volney, "whom I saw last night stealing along the

passage! It was he, too, whom your ladyship"—addressing himself to Zoe—"on two occasions beheld!"

"And now, my dear father," continued Clarine, not pausing to ask a question nor make a comment in respect to the words which M. Volney had just uttered,—"*can* you pardon me for all that I have done? Oh! you know not how my heart was rent when in your study you delivered that solemn injunction in respect to Alfred Delorme! I longed to throw myself at your feet and confess everything: but I dared not! Again I ask, *can* you forgive me?"

"Yes, my dear child—I forgive you!" exclaimed her father: "from the very bottom of my heart do I forgive you!"

Clarine threw herself into her sire's arms; and for several minutes she remained clasped there, weeping upon his breast and he himself weeping over her. The scene was full of an exquisite pathos: and Zoe was profoundly affected.

"Retire, my love—retire to your own chamber" said M. Volney at length; and then he added with accents of deepest fervour, "And may heaven bless you!"

"But have you nothing more to say to me, dear father?" inquired Clarine, upturning her looks towards M. Volney's countenance, and with an expression of half-surprise, half-affliction on her features. "Will you not put me out of all suspense——"

"Listen, Clarine!" interrupted her father, after an instant's air of anguish, suddenly appeared to nerve himself with the fortitude requisite for the utterance of an inflexible decision. "You may as well know the worst at once, and be relieved of all suspense. Clarine, my poor girl—doubly dear to me since that horrible suspicion has been banished from my mind!—your union with the Viscount Delorme is an impossibility. God help thee, my poor child!"

These last words were spoken with the tremulous accents of deepest emotion; and they were followed by a sob which seemed to convulse M. Volney's breast. Clarine bent upon him a look full of unutterable misery; and then she fell senseless in the arm of Lady Octavian. M. Volney, half distracted, flew to fetch restoratives; and when he perceived that his unhappy daughter was slowly returning to consciousness, he

pressed Zoe's hand with nervous violence,—saying, "I cannot wait till she is completely restored! For heaven's sake soothe—console—strengthen her! But remember, Lady Octavian—remember!—that decision of mine is inflexible!"

And with these words M. Volney rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ALPINE TRAGEDY.

It was after breakfast on the following morning—a meal however at which Clarine was not present, and of which neither M. Volney nor Zoe scarcely partook—that he requested her Ladyship to join him presently in his study, as he wished to speak to her on matters of the utmost importance. Zoe hastened first of all to see whether her ministrations were required by Clarine, who was ill in bed; and in about a quarter of an hour she repaired to the study. She found M. Volney pacing to and fro, not with a visible excitement and agitation—but in a slow solemn manner and with a deep dejection of the looks. He placed a chair for Lady Octavian's accommodation: he then sat down at his desk; and he said in a mournful voice, "How fares my daughter now?"

"My opinion is still the same, M. Volney," answered Zoe. "As I told you the instant we met at the breakfast-table, Clarine has received a shock which she will never recover—unless joyous intelligence be speedily conveyed to her. She will die of a broken heart, M. Volney: for all her happiness is centered in her love for Alfred Delorme!"

The pallor which already overspread the French gentleman's countenance, deepened into ghastliness: it was a paleness like that of the dead: it appeared as if all the vital blood had suddenly quitted his body. Even his lips became ashy white: a fearful struggle was evidently taking place within him. In a few moments he rose from his seat—opened the door of the study—and looked forth into the passage with which it communicated. Satisfied that no one was there, he closed the outer door carefully: then he shut an inner door, which was covered with

green baize and which usually stood open.

"Be not alarmed, Lady Octavian, these precautions," he said, slowly returning to his seat: "but I am about to speak to you on a subject for which there must be no listeners."

If Zoe were not exactly alarmed, she nevertheless felt a chill strike ghastly to her heart: for there was something fearful in M. Volney's looks at the moment—something so full of ghastly horror, that it was only too well calculated to produce this effect. He resumed his seat: he drew his chair close towards her; and he said in a voice which had now changed from a deep mournfulness, "That which I am about to tell you, has never yet been breathed to mortal ears; and from your lips must it never go forth again. I need your advice in the awful dilemma in which I am placed: I feel myself totally unable to act according to the guidance of my own soul's promptings. Strong as my mind has hitherto been, the incidents which are now passing have reduced it to a more than childhood's weakness. You, Lady Octavian, have shown yourself so good, so kind, so affectionate towards my daughter—you possess too so much sterling sense—that I readily leave myself in your hands. But in order that you may be enabled to assist me with your judgment and direct my proceedings, I must tell you everything."

M. Volney paused: Zoe had no reply to make—at least not for the present, but she waited with intensest curiosity, and also with a solemn feeling of interest, for the explanations that were to come.

"First of all," resumed M. Volney, "let me inform you of the nature of that letter which Alfred Delorme placed in my hand last night. It was a letter written by my wretched wife to Alfred's father: it was after the birth of my daughter—and by its tenour it fully proved that although they had for some time loved each other with that illicit, fatal affection of their's, yet that was only a few days prior to the writing of that letter that their love had become downright criminal. Yes the evidence that such is the fact is incontrovertible; and therefore was I enabled last night to embrace Clarine for the first time with the conviction that in her I was veritably embracing a daughter! And thus, too, the barrier which my hideous suspicion had raised up against the

possibility of an alliance between herself and Alfred Delorme, has ceased to exist; but there is another—*another*," added M. Volney, with difficulty suppressing a burst of anguish,—"unless indeed by your judgment and under your guidance, Lady Octavian, it can be surmounted."

"And this other barrier?" said Zoe, still in a state of deep and solemn suspense.

"Listen to me," said M. Volney; "and I will tell you a tale which you can little expect to hear. You are already sufficiently acquainted with past events to enable me to take up my narrative from a particular point without any prefatory details. I therefore wish to direct your attention to that period—that fatal period—when I suddenly discovered my wife's infidelity. She died of a broken heart,—overwhelmed with shame and disgrace,—as you have heard. The Viscount Delorme—that false friend who became the author of so much misery—fled to avoid my vengeance: for I sent a friend to provoke him to a mortal duel in which I had resolved that one if not both should perish. But my mind was made up: I was determined to have vengeance: nothing but the blood of that man could appease my furiously excited passions! Heaven knows that up to that instant my character had never displayed itself in a ferocious light—my disposition had never developed savage instincts. But I had experienced a wrong so stupendous that only an adequate vengeance could give rest to my perturbed and excited spirit. At least such was my idea. By some means, which I need not now pause to describe, I got upon the Viscount's track—and I at once pretexted an inclination for a change of residence to an Italian clime. I took my infant daughter and Marguerite with me. Oh, often and often did I wonder within myself wherefore I entertained the least love for that child, and wherefore I did not cast her forth from me as the possible offspring of that illicit love which had dishonoured me. But when I looked upon Clarine's innocent countenance, there was a yearning tenderness in my heart which at least forbade me from being unkind to the babe even if my soul did not absolutely cleave to it. It was the voice of nature whispering, though faintly, within me: for last night has proven that she is indeed my

daughter! Good God, if I had discarded the child—If I had repudiated her!—Oh, what guilt! what sorrow! But thank, heaven, of *that* crime I am innocent!"

A look of grateful fervour, as these last words were uttered, succeeded the strong shudder with which the immediate previous ones were spoken; and Zoe herself shuddered—for she had a presentiment that her ears were about to drink in some terrible revelation,

"Yes—I undertook that journey," continued M. Volney, after a pause: "and at every halting-place I secretly but diligently instituted those inquiries which enabled me to follow up the clue that I had originally obtained. Marguerite fancied that it was my unsettled mind which caused me thus to wander forth for long hours together: but it was in reality for the purpose of making the inquiries to which I have just alluded. At length the intelligence I received led me to Mount St. Bernard—that portion of the Alpine range which overlooks sunny Italy. We reached the Hospice: but now all clue to the Viscount Delorme seemed suddenly lost. He had not visited the Hospice; and yet I had the positive certainty that he had commenced the ascent of the mountain. I wandered about for hours and hours together in that dangerous region of snows and glaciers; and the faithful Marguerite was more than ever frightened on my account. Yes—I dared a thousand perils while hunting a man on those Alpine heights with as much tenacity of purpose as ever the hard mountaineer displayed in chasing the chamois. Thus several days passed; and at length one forenoon, amidst an almost blinding sleet, I beheld a sin-
horsemanship toiling up a steep slope
was he—my mortal enemy—the
of my search—the man whom
hunting—the Viscount Delorme

"M. Volney," said Zoe, shuddering and with a countenance pale as death, "tell me no more—I b
tell me no more! I dare
what the rest of you
bo: but it seems as
heard too much!"

"Lady Octavian," said the
gentleman, in a voice that was so
audible "I beseech you to hear
rest! You must know everything—
else you will be unable to assist me"

your judgment. Nothing must be concealed from you—nothing withheld. If you were left to conjecture, it might fall short of the terrible, the astounding truth! Besides," added M. Volney, "a few words will explain the rest—and these words shall be quickly said."

"No, no!" gasped Zoe: but her accents were even less audible than those in which the Frenchman had just been speaking.

"It was amidst that cloud of beating sleet, mingled with snow-flakes," continued M. Volney, heedless of Lady Octavian's weak and feeble interruption, "that the horseman advanced. I stood with my back towards him until he was on a level with me; then in consequence of the suddenness with which I turned towards him, his horse started, shied, and flung the Viscount from his back. The scene was terrible. The animal reared—fell back upon its haunches—and slipping with its hinder hoofs, was in an instant over the precipice. The fearful cry which it sent up from the tremendous depth into which it was plunging down, was like the voices of a dozen human beings all concentrated in the horrible concord of one wild terrific yell of agony. At the same instant my knee was upon the breast of Delorme—my hand grasped his throat. The rage of ten thousand fiends was boiling in the hell of my soul: there was the strength of an iron vice in the fingers that were tightening about my enemy's neck. Desperate were his struggles: but he had no more chance in contending with me, than if he were an infant in the hands of a giant. And yet naturally he was far stronger than I—more powerful of form—more vigorous of arm and limb. For it was the raging pandemonium of vindictive fury that rendered me at the time invincible—irresistible—dominant,—and which gave me the strength of ten thousand. A few moments, and I started up with a revulsion of unutterable horror in my soul: for that vice-like gripe of mine had only relaxed its hold upon the Viscount's throat when the last breath and sign of life had come gurgling from his lips. He at last was a corpse; and I—I, Lady Octavian Meredith, stood there, amidst that wild Alpine scene, a branded murderer!"

Zoe gazed, with a ghastly terror and horror-stricken stupefaction of the feelings, upon the equally ghastly face of M. Volney. She was transfixed to her

seat; she seemed turned into a statue: all the blood had curdled in her veins. Her lips were apart—but no breath came through them: it was held in awful suspense: her bosom remained upheaved.

"And now, Lady Octavian," continued M. Volney, still in a hollow voice, "you know my secret. I have not shrunk from trusting you with it. I know that you will not betray me. I was a vengeance which I wreaked and though before I perpetrated the deed I considered myself justified in seeking the deadliest revenge for my outraged honour and my wrecked happiness—though all the world too would hold that I was thus justified—yet frankly do I confess that my conscience has reproached me ever since the moment that I stood a murderer amidst that wild Alpine scenery! Nevertheless, I repeat I know that you will not betray me. But let me continue—I have only a few more words to say. I took from the person of the Viscount whatever papers might prove his identity; and I dragged the corpse to a spot where I saw that the drifting snow was accumulating fast. In a few minutes the body of the Viscount was completely enveloped in the winding-sheet which nature's hand wove in countless myriads of flake around it;—and I knew that my secret was safe. And so it proved. Several years elapsed ere the corpse was discovered from its mausoleum of snow by one of the dogs of the Hospice; and several more years elapsed ere the Marchioness and Alfred were led to the elucidation of the lost Viscount's fate. Alfred came to me at Fontainebleau to report the discovery—to entreat my forgiveness towards his father's memory—and to beseech that there might be reconciliation between the two families; for he said that if I received him with rancour, he should feel as if his father's sins were being visited anathematizingly upon himself. I saw that the young man suspected not his sire had met his death otherwise than by an accident which often overtakes travellers amidst the Alpine mountains:—but yet I was alarmed! Conscience, Lady Octavian," added M. Volney in a solemn tone, "makes cowards of us all!"

There was another brief pause—a pause which Zoe could not interrupt—for she was still a prey to almost overwhelming feelings: but the French

gentleman soon continued in the following strain:—

"I refused to give the hand of friendship to Alfred Delorme. It was not, Lady Octavian, because I in reality visited upon himself the sins of his father; it was because I could not bear the idea of meeting, much less encouraging the visits of one whose presence would continuously remind me that his sire had met his death at my hand. And then too, the horrible suspicion existed in my mind that the same blood which flowed in the veins of Alfred Delorme might also flow in the veins of Clarine; and I recoiled in consternation from the idea that it was possible for them to become enamoured of each other. Thus, in order to rid myself of Alfred Delorme—in the hope of preventing him from seeking me out for the future—I roughly and rudely repelled his conciliatory overtures. I resumed the air and speech of vindictiveness; I sent him away saddened and dejected. And then I lost no time in abandoning my home and taking Clarine with me—it being my intention to bury ourselves in some deep solitude. It was amongst the Pyrenean regions or the wilds of Catalonia that I thought of settling our future abode; but on reaching the adjacent village and on beholding this Chateau, I conceived the place and neighbourhood to be sufficiently suited for my purpose. It has however pleased heaven to direct the footsteps of Alfred Delorme hither; and that which I had done so much to avoid—that which I have so much striven to prevent, has taken place. They have met—and they love each other!"

There was another brief pause; and then M. Volney concluded thus:—

"One tremendous barrier has been broken down; it ceases to exist. That letter, which Alfred Delorme must doubtless have found amongst his deceased father's papers, when taking possession of his ancestral home—or which might have been in possession of the Marchioness who so tenderly reared him—has convinced me that my wife became not completely criminal until after the birth of Clarine. That barrier therefore is destroyed. But how can I recognise Alfred Delorme as my son-in-law?—how can I extend the hand of friendship towards him—that hand which took his father's life! Counsel—advise me, Lady Octavian. I pledge

myself to fulfil your injunction, whatever they may be! But as for that terrible secret of mine——"

"It is safe, M. Volney—it is safe with me," replied Zoe, in a low voice of deep solemnity. "You will not expect me to offer any comment upon that terrible portion of your narrative. But in respect to Clarine—in respect to the Viscount—I can have no hesitation in offering an opinion. If you insist upon severing them, you will be sacrificing their happiness to the sense of——"

"I understand you, Lady Octavian!" said M. Volney: "to the sense of my own guilt! Yes, Yes—it is so! I must not be selfish!"

"No, M. Volney," observed Lady Octavian impressively; "there must be the completest self-abnegation on your part——"

"There shall be—there shall be!" responded the French gentleman "Poor Clarine! she has already been made too much the victim of my own wretched destiny!"

He rose from his seat, and paced the room for a few instants with agitated steps; his form was bowed—he looked ten years older than he had seemed on the preceding day.

"Yes—they shall be united!" he said suddenly stopping short in front of Lady Octavian. "Hasten and convey this intelligence to Clarine. The bridal shall take place soon; and afterwards—afterwards," added M. Volney, "I will seek some foreign country—there to dwell for the remainder of my life!"

Zoe could not help compassionating the unhappy man whose crime had arisen from a sense of deepest wrong; and when she issued from his presence, she felt that the tears were streaming down her cheeks. Having composed her feelings somewhat, she sped to Clarine's chamber; and to that young lady did she impart the happy intelligence which she had to convey. We need scarcely had that Zoe respected M. Volney's secret, terrible though it were. Joy—indescribable joy expanded upon Clarine's countenance: the sense of indisposition vanished; and she hastened to apparel herself that she might welcome her lover when he should come, according to appointment, to learn M. Volney's decision.

CHAPTER CVII.

THE DISGUISED ONE.

It was evening,—a beautiful evening in the middle of September; and a gentle breeze had succeeded the heat of a day of more than usual sultriness for that period of the year. Queen Indora was walking in the garden attached to her beautiful villa in the neighbourhood of Notting Hill and Bayswater; she was alone, and reflecting upon the incidents of her past life. The purple which blended with the other hues of her garments, indicated that she was in mourning. Her dress was European, half oriental. She wore the flowing skirt belonging to the feminine garb of the former style; a species of caftan, and the undergarment developing the rich proportions of her bust, were of the Eastern fashion. The jolly masses of her hair hung far down her back, below her waist, and seemed like a thick ebony veil which might be drawn at will over the countenance.

There was a certain degree of pensiveness expressed in the looks of the Queen, which was not however altogether sorrowful. Subjects for mourning and rejoicing were blending in her thoughts: on one side was her father's death—on the other the assurance which she had received from Clement Redcliffe that he would accept her hand. Still Indora was thoughtful; she walked with a slow pace, and when reaching a fountain in the midst of the garden, she stood there gazing upon the flow of the crystal water, and giving way to the reflections that were uppermost in her mind.

From amidst a knot of trees an ominous countenance was surveying her. Without preserving any unnecessary mystery in the present instance, we will at once declare that the individual thus concealed was none other than Barney the Barker. Nothing could be more admirable than the fellow's disguise—nothing more complete than his transmutation, so to speak. He wore the wig with frizzly curls which the Duke of Marchmont had given him: his countenance was stained dusky with the dye which he had obtained from the same source: he wore spectacles; and a large overhanging moustache concealed the malformation of his upper lip. In respect to apparel, the Barker had a

very decent appearance; and he no longer retained the huge club which was wont to be his almost inseparable companion. In this disguise was it that Barney had dared to come up to London; and now for the first time he had penetrated into the grounds of the villa where Queen Indora dwelt.

Little suspected the oriental lady that she was in the close vicinity of one who harboured such evil designs towards her; little likewise did she imagine that the power of her beauty was at that instant exercising its influence over the soul of one of the greatest miscreants in all Christendom. And yet such was the case. The Barker—whose disposition was naturally of a brutal callousness, and who of all men in the world was the least susceptible of a sentiment that could interfere with any business that he had on hand—was now smitten with a feeling hitherto unknown. It appeared as if he had never rightly until this minute comprehended what female beauty was; but now he began to understand what he was meant by regular well chiselled features—by eyes of splendid lustre—by nobly arching brows that gave intelligence and lofty frankness to the countenance—by the magnificent symmetry of shape—and by the blending of all that elegance, gracefulness, and dignity which combined to render Indora at once the fascinating and the queen-like woman she was. Yes—all this did the Barker begin to appreciate; and the brutal ruffianism of his nature was melting under the influence of that supernal loveliness which he was now surveying. Indeed, the eastern lady appeared to him something more than woman; she looked as if she were a goodness; there was something about her which not merely charmed—it likewise overawed; and there was a moment when the miscreant almost felt as if he could rush forth from his ambush, throw himself at her feet, and implore her pardon!

Indora passed away from the vicinity of the fountain; and as the Barker followed with his eyes her slowly retreating form, he thought to himself that never had he before been struck by the beauty which exists in a woman's faultless shape. These hitherto unknown feelings expanded and strengthened within him; and it seemed as if he had suddenly become altogether a different being from what he was. Indora

disappeared in a turning of the gravel-walk: and then the Barker asked himself, "What the devil is all this that has come over me? I feel just like a child. I suppose it must be because I haven't got my club as usual; and I'm like a lion without his teeth and claws. And yet that lady is uncommon beautiful! I never thought so much before of what a woman's good looks might be."

Here Indora reappeared to the Barker's view: he left off communing with himself—his gaze was once more riveted upon her. As she drew nearer, he beheld an expression of ineffable sadness pass over her countenance; she was thinking of her late father, and the tears trickled down her cheeks. She raised her kerchief to wipe them away; and the Barker was struck by the exquisite modelling of her hand and of as much of the arm as the sleeve of the caftan suffered to be visible. Then she thought of Clement Redcliffe, and a sweet smile played upon her lips, revealing a glimpse of the teeth of ivory whiteness. The Barker literally quivered at the strangeness of these new feelings which had come over him; and again was he on the point of rushing forth and imploring the lady's pardon for the design which he had entertained towards her. But he checked himself; for at the instant his ear caught other footsteps advancing along a neighbouring gravel-walk.

It was Sagoonah, who sought her mistress; and now the Barker beheld that splendid Hindoo woman the dark grandeur of whose beauty was of so high an order, and whose litho form was of so bayadere a symmetry. The Barker was astonished at the spectacle of this new personification of another style of feminine charm: and as the two walked away together, he followed them with his gaze. But in his own mind he endeavoured to establish a choice between them, it settled upon Indora. Yet the heart of this man, who was stained with a thousand crimes, and himself a monster of ugliness—deeply touched by both the specimens of oriental beauty which he had thus seen.

"You seek me, my Sagoonah," said Queen Indora, as they slowly walked away from the fountain: "have you any thing to communicate?"

"No, my lady," answered the ayah: "but you gave me permission to join you occasionally when you were alone."

"Yes, my faithful Sagoonah," rejoined the Queen: "because I have fancied that for the last few days you have been pensive and mournful—or that at least you have had strange fits of abstraction——"

"Oh, no, my lady!" said Sagoonah, lifting her large dark eyes with an air of the most ingenuous candour towards Indora's countenance. "I can assure you that it is not so!—I have already given your ladyship the same assurance!"

"I am glad to hear you repeat it, Sagoonah," remarked the Queen; "because you know that I experienced an affection for you. You have served me so truly and faithfully!—But tell me, Sagoonah," asked Indora, thus suddenly interrupting herself, "shall you be glad soon to return to your own native country?"

"I am always happy where your ladyship is," replied the ayah.

"And you will go back, my Sagoonah," proceeded the Queen, now smiling good-naturedly and with a caressing manner,—"you will go back without having lost your heart to any native of this metropolis?"

Sagoonah stooped suddenly down to pluck a flower that grew on the edge of the border which Indora and herself were passing at the time: and then she looked up into the countenance of her mistress with the same ingenuously frank expression as before. For at instant Indora was smitten with a suspicion—on account of the incident of the flower, which had a sort of petulance in it—that the words she had used in good-humoured jocularly had really touched a chord vibrating in the ayah's heart: but this idea quickly vanished when Sagoonah thus gazed up at her in so candid a manner.

"Yes, my faithful dependant," continued the Queen. "I know that you, will rejoice to return to your native land; and the time is not far distant when we shall set off thither. And we shall not go alone, my dear Sagoonah," proceeded Indora, a blush now suffusing the delicate duskiness of her complexion: "I have already given you to understand——"

At this instant the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Christian and Christina, who were advancing along the gravel-walk—for our young hero had been passing the day at the villa. 2 Sagoonah retired, but as she slowly

walked back towards the villa, brilliant fires flashed forth from her eyes—and the Barker, as she passed close by the spot where he still lay in ambush was suddenly seized with amazement—yes, and even with a wild unknown terror as he beheld the lightnings of those burning orbs. Shortly afterwards Queen Indora re-entered the villa in company with Christian and Christina; and then the Barker, stealing forth from the grounds, betook himself slowly towards the main road,—wondering at the strange feelings which had come over him and which had paralyzed his arm at the very instant Indora seemed to be in his power.

But notwithstanding the strength of the impression thus made upon the monster at the time, it gradually grew fainter now that the eastern lady was no longer before his view. He began to curse himself for his folly: he thought of the heavy bribe which had been promised him—of the danger which he incurred by remaining in the metropolis—and of the facilities which had been held out for his emigration to Australia or some other part of the world.

"And have I been fool enough," he said to himself, "to lose sight of all them there advantages just because a petticoat of a rayther better shape than usual, was a flaunting afore my eyes. I tell you what, Barney," he continued, thus apostrophizing himself: "It's my opinion as how you're getting to be a cussed fool; and if so be I had my stout stick in my fist, I'd just lay it over your precious back."

M. Barnes walked on: the dusk was setting in—the lamps were lighted—there were two continuous lines of illumination stretching towards Oxford Street, far as the eye could reach. All of a sudden the Barker was accosted by some one who asked him the way to a particular street which he named. Barney could scarcely repress a visible start when the voice first sounded in his ear: for the individual who thus accosted him, was none other than old Jonathan Carnabie, the parish-clerk and sexton of Wood-bridge.

"Well, yes—I do know the way," replied the Barker, rendering his voice as soft and oily as he possibly could: "but if so be you're a stranger in London, sir, I should advise you to take a cab—"

"The fact is, sir," interrupted Jonathan, "I am walking on principle.

It is the first time I was ever in London; and I want to know something about it; therefore I like to find my way on foot—and if I lose it, I inquire it."

"Quite right, sir—quite right!" said the Barker, "But you ought to take care of yourself—I mean of your pockets you know—"

"And so I do, sir," answered Jonathan Carnabie. "I've read in books and I've also been told that London abounds in queer characters; but I keep my money for the most part at my lodgings, and just come out with as much as I think I may require."

"Quite right, sir—again said the Barker. "I happen to be going a part of your way—"

"In which case," said the old sexton, "I shall be happy to avail myself of your guidance. Excuse me, sir, but I saw at once that you were a respectable man—or else I should not have taken the liberty to address you."

"Quite right, sir," said the Barker, who now that he had got hold of a particular phrase, harped upon it; for he thought that it had helped to make this favourable impression.

They walked along together, Mr. Barnes was satisfied that his disguise was complete; and from the moment that Jonathan Carnabie had mentioned the money at his lodgings the Barker experienced an irresistible inclination towards his wonted practices. He saw no reason why he should not fleece the sexton if possible; and moreover he experienced a sort of pride and an inward gloating satisfaction at the thought of being thus able so effectually to deceive the old man in respect to who really was.

"Have you been long in London, sir?" inquired the Barker, speaking slowly, and measuring his words as much as possible, for fear that he should let out any favourite expression of his own and which might raise Carnabie's suspicions.

"Only a matter of three or four days, sir," responded the sexton. "I presume you live in London, sir?"

"Yes," answered the Barker; "I'm a man of business—"

"Perhaps a lawyer, sir?" said the sexton inquiringly.

"Well, I do a little in the conveyancing line now and then," rejoined the Barker.

"And very profitable too, sir, no doubt?" said the sexton, who was pleased as well as proud of having fallen in with such good company.

"Quite right—quite right, sir!" said Mr. Barnes. "I do manage to get a good livin' by the transfer of property."

"I suppose you attend the Courts, sir—the Law Courts, I mean?" continued Jonathan.

"Not more than I can help," responded the Barker. "That's a atmosphere that don't agree with me."

"Too hot and close, sir?" suggested Mr. Carnabie, who was inclined to be chatty and to make himself agreeable.

"Well, it don't agree with me werry well," rejoined Mr. Barnes: "it always gives me a queer feelin'—But perhaps you'd like to take a drop of summut, sir?" he suddenly interrupted himself, just as he was on the very point of adding that the queer sensation he alluded to very much resembled a crick in the neck.

"I think I'd rather not take anything, sir, till I get to my lodgings," said Jonathan: "but if you would condescend to step in with me and drink a quite glass of brandy and water, I shall feel very proud. My landlord is a superior sort of man—he is a schoolmaster and parish clerk—Mr. Chubb by name. Perhaps you have heard of him, sir?"

"I've heerd speak of a man named Chubb, which is famous for making looks," answered the Barker; "and I can't abear—"

But here he choked himself again; and the truth was that old Jonathan Carnabie did not take particular notice of the Barker's bad grammar and peculiar phraseology, so pleased and flattered was he at having fallen in with a legal gentleman of such great respectability. And then, too, it was the old sexton's first appearance in London: he had been accustomed to the country all his life—and he was inclined to view everything and everybody pertaining to the metropolis in a superior light. The Barker—more and more convinced that the mystery of his disguise was absolutely impenetrable, and resolved to amuse as well as benefit himself at Jonathan Carnabie's expense—began holding forth to him on the beauties and wonders of the metropolis, with the idea of rendering himself as agreeable as possible.

"This here is a werry fine road," said Mr. Barnes; "as straight as a harrow

right up to Oxford Street 'till you come to the corner of the Tottenham Court Road and St. Giles's. You see this here gate on your right hand leading into the Park? Well, it's Tyburn."

"God bless me!" said old Jonathan, "Not where the people used to be hanged?"

"The werry identical same," responded Mr. Barnes. "There's many a fine feller has rode a horse there, foaled by a acorn, and danced upon nothink amidst werry great applause. My grandfather—"

"Most likely saw many such sights?" said Mr. Carnabie inquiringly.

"Yes—he was rayther fond of 'em," rejoined the Barker, who had been upon the point of letting out that his respectable ancestor was one of the individuals who had given a terrible notoriety to the district of Tyburn. "Pray, sir, what's your idea of the punishment of death?"

"Why," answered Jonathan, who was imbued with all antiquated prejudices, "I think that when a man has done a great deal of wickedness, he ought to be put out of the world."

"Quite right, sir—quite right!" said the Barker emphatically. "I'd hang 'em all, the scoundrell I suppose you have come up to London, sir, on a little business?"

"Yes," answered Jonathan; "and I've got all my expenses paid, as well as good lodging found for me: so that I've got a little opportunity of enjoying myself in a quiet way."

"A country gentleman, I presume, sir?" said the Barker, with as much of an insinuating tone as he possibly assume.

"Not exactly a gentleman," rejoined old Carnabie, who was a man of truth, "I hope you won't think the worse of me, sir when I tell you that I'm a parish clerk?"

"Why, if there's a class of men that I cotton to more than all others," exclaimed the Barker as if in admiration, "it's the werry respectable one that you belongs to. I've always found 'em a set of intelligent say nothink to nobody set of chaps; and at this present speaking I've got three cousins and two uncles which is parish-clerks themselves. You should just see how fond the Archbishop of Westminster is of my cousin Tom!"

"Dear me!" ejaculated "Mr. Carnabio: "I was not aware [that there was an Archbishop of Westminster,"

"To be sure!" ejaculated the Barker: "he lives just t'other side of the bridge—a beautiful palace, with the Noted Stout House on one side, and the famous sassage shop on t'other. I'll see if I can't get my cousin Paul—Tom I mean—to introduce you to his lordship."

Mr. Carnabio was quite confounded at the idea of such an honour: and when he had somewhat recovered from its effects, he expressed his acknowledgments in suitable terms.

"Oh! I can introduce you to a many fine folks," continued the Barker. "There's the Chief Judge at the old Bailey, and two or three of the magistrates, which knows me uncommon well. How long, sir, do you think of staying in London?"

"It all depends on circumstances," replied the sexton. "I am not entirely my own master. But excuse me, sir, for not being more confidential on the business that has brought me up to town; it's quite of a private nature——"

"Pray don't make any apology, sir," interrupted Barney. "You're quite right to keep your own counsel. What did you say your name was, sir?"

"My name is Jonathan Carnabio, at your service sir," responded the old sexton.

"And mine, sir, is Mr. John Smith," rejoined the Barker. "I don't happen to have a bit of paste-board about me at the moment: but I shall be verry happy to see you to dine with me to-morrow at my house, No 347, Grosvenor Square. No ceremony, you know. Just a bit of fish, a plain joint, and summut of that sort—with maybe a bottle of wine or so."

Again was Mr. Carnabio confounded by the honours and favours thus showered upon him; and again were his acknowledgments duly expressed. He and his companion walked on together, until at length they reached the commencement of the street in which Mr. and Mrs. Chubb resided, and which the sexton now recognised as the locality to which he had sought to be directed.

"I tell you what," said the Barker, "let you and me be alone together over this glass of brandy-and-water that we're going to have at your place: cos why, don't you see, I don't know nothink of your landlord—and it won't do for a

man like me to demean himself to associate with everybody."

"But Mr. Chubb is a parish clerk!" exclaimed Jonathan: and I thought you just now said——"

"All right, my good friend!" interrupted the Barker: "I don't fly from my word. Parish clerks is the best fellows in existence; but I happen to know summut of this man Chubb, now that I come into this street and recollect where he lives."

"Why, is he not a respectable person?" inquired Mr. Carnabio in astonishment. "Those who recommended me to his lodgings—or who indeed took them for me, I should rather say——"

"Well, well," said the Barker, "he's respectable enough as far as the world goes. But betwixt you and me and the post," added Mr. Barnes, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, "there isn't a burial that takes place in Chubb's churchyard that he don't make ten or twelve guineas more out of it than he had ought to do. You understand me—a nod is as good as a wink—and Chubb is hand and glove with the surgeons."

"God bless me!" ejaculated old Jonathan, stopping suddenly: "short "do you mean to say that he is in league with the resurrectionists?"

"Nothink more nor less," answered the Barker. "But keep your own counsel. It isn't for me to make mischief: I only tell you this to show why I don't choose exactly to put my feet under the same mahogany with this feller Chubb."

Old Jonathan Carnabio gave a deep groan of horror; but the Barker hastened to speak a few reassuring words: and they continued their way to the front door of Mr. Chubb's residence.

CHAPTER CVIII.

CONTINUATION OF THE BARKER'S

ADVENTURES.

THAT door was opened by the slipshod servant-girl who was maid-of-all-work in the house, and Jonathan Carnabio led the way to the little parlour which he occupied and which was the very same that Christian Ashton tenanted at the time he was private secretary to that illustrious potentate, the Grand Duke of Maxo-Stolburg-Quotha. Barney the

Burker followed his new acquaintance into the parlour: the girl was ordered to bring up glasses and hot water: the brandy was produced; and after having imbibed the contents of the first tumbler, Jonathan Carnabie found his spirits expanding after the damp thrown upon them by the terrible aspersion flung against the character of his landlord Mr. Chubb.

"You're werry comfortable here—werry comfortable indeed," said the Burker, looking around him.

"Yes," answered Jonathan, "there is nothing to complain of in respect to the lodgings. I've got a nice little bedroom exactly overhead."

"And I hope you lock your door at night," said the Burker, in a low voice. "Not that I mean to say the people of the house would do anythink wrong: but London is a queer place, and thieves is like ghoultesses—they insinivates themselves here, there, and everywhere."

"Thank you for the hint," said old Jonathan, refilling his tumbler. "I myself have had a little bit of experience in respect to the consummate villany of a London scoundrel. Did you ever hear of a man called Barney the Burker?"

"I can't say that I have," responded the individual himself, speaking in a slow and measured tone, as if he were racking his memory upon the point. "Who is he?"

"A murderer—and everything that is bad," replied Jonathan. "He came down into the country—I took him as an assistant—the ungrateful wretch was very near murdering me—but assistance came at the very nick of time—the villain fled precipitately, and plunged into the river. It was thought that he was drowned; but only a few days ago he turned up somewhere in London—Surely you must have heard, Mr. Smith, of a house that was entered by the police, and where on digging up the cellar or some underground place, evidences were discovered of barbarous murders having been committed?"

"To be sure! Now you mention it," said the Burker, "I do know summut about it. It was in the papers—wasn't it?"

"Yes," replied Jonathan; "and heavy rewards were offered for the discovery of the wretches. I hope they will be found."

"I hope they will," added the Burker, as he coolly set about compounding his

third tumbler of punch. "Well, all them things, Mr. Carnabie," he continued, "shows how careful you ought to be in locking your doors of nights and stowing away your cash in a place of safety. I tell you what I do: I always have a matter of five or six hundred guineas in my house; and I poke it all up the chimley in my bed-room. That's botwixt you and me; but no one would think of looking up a chimley in search of money."

"I content myself," answered Jonathan, "with looking up the little I have got in my box. It isn't much—but still it's too much to lose."

"Quite right! quite right!" said the Burker: "never throw away a chance."

In this manner they continued to discourse for some little while longer—until old Jonathan Carnabie began to feel the effects of the hot-brand-and-water which he was drinking. Then the Burker suggested something about the propriety of a little bit of supper—adding "that he was always accustomed to take a mouthful at nine o'clock in the evening, at his mansion, No. 347, Grosvenor Square,—where he should be happy to see his friend Mr. Carnabie to dinner at five o'clock on the morrow."

The old Sexton, in spite of the penuriousness of his habits, thought that he could not possibly do otherwise than give the best possible entertainment to so liberal, generous and hospitable a friend; and as he himself had dined at two o'clock, he had no disinclination for a supper. He therefore suggested a rump-steak, and was preparing to ring the bell to order the same,—when the Burker caught him by the arm, saying, "Stop, my good friend! don't trust that dirty drab of a servant to go out and buy anythink for you. There's nothink like a lobster for supper; and it just happens that my own fishmonger lives close by. No offence—but I'll go myself and send in the finest he's got."

Jonathan vowed that he would pay for the lobster: but Mr. Barnes would not think of such a thing; and he issued forth accordingly. Proceeding to the nearest fishmonger's he purchased a very fine lobster, which he ordered to be sent to Mr. Chubb's; and on his way back, the Burker just dropped into a chemist's shop, where he procured a small phial of a certain liquid drug which he pretended to be under the necessity of taking. He then returned to Mr. Chubb's abode,

and rejoined his friend Mr. Jonathan Carnabie.

The lobster was served up; and the old sexton relished it all the more that he had not been compelled to pay for it. Another jug of hot water was brought up: the tumbler were refilled: and the Barker seized the opportunity to pour a few drops from his phial into Jonathan Carnabie's glass. Five minutes afterwards the old sexton was lying back in his arm-chair in a state of complete stupefaction.

The Barker rose from his own seat—took a candle in his hands—and crept softly up the stairs to the bed-room overhead. To force open the box was the work of a few moments; and at the bottom of all the clothes the villain discovered about thirty sovereigns in a stocking.

"Well, the game was worth playing for," he said to himself, as he secured the coins about his person; and then he cautiously crept down the stairs again.

At that very instant there was a loud double knock at the front door: the Barker, hastily puffing out the candle, put it in a corner; and the next instant he himself opened the door. A tall gentleman in a cloak was on the steps; and Barney at once recognised the person who had so suddenly interfered to prevent his murderous design on old Jonathan Carnabie at Woodbridge. But not for an instant did the Barker lose his presence of mind: he issued forth; and the next moment the servant girl appeared to answer the inquiry of Mr. Redcliffe—for he, as the reader has doubtless understood, was the tall gentleman in the cloak. We must add that not for an instant had Mr. Redcliffe suspected that the individual who had just passed him was the miscreant Barker.

We must follow the footsteps of the last-mentioned person. On turning the nearest corner, he quickened his pace—he sped into Oxford Street—and entering a cab, ordered the driver to take him to Whitechapel Church. On arriving there the Barker dismissed the cab, walked along for a few minutes, and entering a public-house, sat down to reflect upon the course which he should now pursue. He somewhat repented the trick he had played old Jonathan Carnabie. Not that he regretted having obtained possession of the thirty sovereigns—very far from it; but he feared there would be a hue and cry—

and whether or not it was suspected that it was veritably the Barker who had committed the robbery, an accurate description of his present personal appearance would be sure to obtain publicity. He must therefore change his disguise altogether, and it was on this subject he was now deliberating within himself.

It was a small public-house, in an obscure street leading out of Whitechapel, which Barney had thus entered. There was only one other person in the little parlour at the time; and this individual speedily rose and took his departure. A few minutes afterwards the door opened; and another person entered. He wore a low-crowned hat with very broad brims—beneath which appeared masses of red hair; and he had large whiskers, of a corresponding hue. He wore a pair of these green spectacles which have side-glasses, and are denominated shades. A loose brown jacket, or overcoat, was buttoned up to the throat, which was encircled by a thick shawl-neckerchief. The overcoat, as well as the grey pantaloons, were a little the worse for wear; and it was difficult at a first glance to judge what the actual position or the avocation of the individual might be. The waiter followed him into the room with a glass of hot gin-and-water; the green-spectacled stranger throw down a sovereign and received the change. Before the waiter left the parlour, the Barker ordered his own glass to be refilled; and in the meanwhile, he was furtively surveying the individual who had just entered. The latter was doing precisely the same thing in respect to the Barker; and though the eyes of both were shaded by spectacles, yet each appeared to have the intuitive suspicion that he was the object of these stealthy regards on the part of the other.

The waiter brought in the fresh supply of spirit-and-water, which the Barker had ordered and when he had retired, the two occupants of the parlour surveyed each other again in the same stealthy manner as before. At length the Barker burst into a loud laugh; and dashing his hand upon the table, exclaimed, "By jingo, Jack, it's excellent! The only thing is it's too good!"

Jack Smedley—for he was the disguised individual who had so recently entered—started up from his seat in alarm at that sudden guffaw on the

Burker's part: but recognising his friend's voice, he was relieved of a world of terror.

"You don't mean to say this is *you*, Barney?" exclaimed Jack, as they shook hands.

"Hush, you fool! No mentioning of names!" growled the Burker, savagely. "But I tell you that you've done the thing too strong; that red wig of your'n," he continued, in a low voice, "isn't natural; them false whiskers is too bushy; and then you've got the very identical broad-brimmed tile you was always used to wear. What do you think of this for a masquering costume?"—and the Burker glanced complacently over his own person.

"I never should have known you," answered Jack. "But I say, don't you think the people of the house will think it odd that two such queer-looking chaps—both with spectacles on—should meet in their parlour?"

"Where are you living, Jack?" inquired Barney, hastily.

"Pretty close by," was the response. "I've got a bit of a lodging, and three or four sorts of disguises——"

"The very ticket!" said the Burker. "Tell us where it is. Then you go off first—I'll follow in a few minutes—and we'll have a chat about our affairs."

This arrangement was carried into effect; and in something less than half-an-hour the Burker and Jack Smedley were seated together in a small poorly-furnished back room belonging to a house in one of the obscure narrow streets leading out of the Commercial Road.

"And so you haven't heard anythink about Bab?" said the Burker, thus resuming the thread of a conversation which was temporarily interrupted by the process of mixing some spirits and water, the materials for which Jack Smedley had just placed upon the table.

"Nothing of her," answered the last named individual. "I suppose you know how I gave the detectives the slip at the station the other day; and ever since I've been playing at hide-and-seek with them."

"You don't mean to say they're on your track?" demanded the Burker.

"I hope not," responded Jack Smedley, shuddering violently at the bare idea. "But what is it otherwise than playing at hide-and-seek when one is

obliged to go about in all sorts of disguises? I'm sure I don't how it is to end; I'm uncommon tired of this kind of life; but I don't dare leave London—I think it's the safest place after all when one's in trouble."

"No doubt of it!" remarked the Burker. "But the people of this house?"

"Oh! they're all right enough—or at least I hope so," rejoined Jack Smedley. "I pass as Mr. Wilkins here; and they think I'm a begging-letter imposter or something of that sort. You may very well suppose that I have not taken the trouble to undeceive them."

"I should rayther think not," replied the Burker. "As for myself, I've just been doing a little bit of business which renders it necessary that I should turn myself inside out and put on a new disguise."

"Well," responded Jack Smedley, "there is choice enough here for you;" and opening a box he displayed several disguises of different kinds, and each being as unlike all the rest as possible. "But where have you been living in London?"

"I haven't been living nowhere," rejoined the Burker. "I only come up to town this morning—and I don't think my name has yet figured in the Fashionable Arrivals."

"And that disguise that dye for your face——"

"Oh! it's too long to tell how I come by it," interrupted the Burker. "I've got some business in hand that will keep me in London for a day or two—perhaps more; and therefore I shall just take the liberty of borrowing one of these here disguises. What the deuce is this?—a Jews gaberdine and a graat grey beard——"

"Yes—wig and all complete," exclaimed Jack Smedley. "It's the only dress I have not as yet worn. But hadn't you better stay and sleep here in my place to-night——"

"It won't do, Jack, for two such fellers as you and me to be too much together," interrupted the Burker. "I shall leave you presently; but we can make an appointment somewhere for to-morrow night—and in the meantime I'll just borrow this dress of your's."

Thus speaking, the Burker proceeded to examine the gaberdine, the wig, and the beard; and he thought to himself that it would be the very best disguise he could possibly assume.

"Where did you buy this?" he asked, thinking it prudent to ascertain something of that particular disguise's antecedents if he could succeed in obtaining such information.

"I bought the whole kit which you've got in your hand, at a shop in Rosemary Lane," replied Jack Smedley.

The Barker proceeded to put off his own disguise, and he likewise washed the chemical dye from his hands and face. Then, by means of a thick fluid gum which Smedley furnished him, he fastened on the grey beard, which covered all the lower part of his face, and which with its associated moustache concealed the mal-formation of his lip. He put on the grey wig which formed part of the costume; he hesitated as to resuming the spectacles—but he at length decided on discarding them. The gaberdine was one of those long, black, loose, straight-out upper garments worn by some of those old-fashioned Jews who sell pastiles, soap, or rhubarb in the streets; and when the Barker had put it on, Jack Smedley expressed his approval of the completeness of the disguise. A low hat, with very large brims, crowned the Barker's head; and as he gave one of his coarse laughs, he expressed a wish that he had a small wooden tray and a few pastiles, that he might play his new part to perfection.

"And now, Jack, I'm off," he added. "You've lent me a good disguise—and you've got some of my toggery in return. If it was a little colder, I shouldn't have given you up that handsome black coat of mine. But how about to-morrow night? Where shall we meet?"

After a few minutes' deliberation, a place was named; and the Barker sallied forth. Returning into White chapel, he pursued his way towards Aldgate,—in the vicinage of which he was acquainted with a public-house where he knew he could obtain a bed for the night without any questions being asked. But all of a sudden he stopped short; and a deep but terrible imprecation burst from his lips. He had left all his money behind him in the breast-pocket of the coat which he had taken off at Jack Smedley's lodging. Yes—all the money he had received from the Duke of Marchmont, and all of which he had so recently plundered Jonathan Carnaby, had been thus left behind! In his breeches-pocket he had but three or four shillings and a few half-pence.

"I don't think Jack would rob a paly said the Barker to himself, as he began hastily to retrace his way towards the lodging-house; and yet the miscreant had terrible misgivings in his mind.

The long gaberdine getting about his legs, encumbered him in his walk, which now almost amounted to a run; and he kept on muttering imprecations against the Jewish costume in which he had disguised himself. He reached the lodging-house; he knocked at the door—the summons was attended to by an old woman, who was the mistress of the place; and she exclaimed angrily, "What do you mean by coming back again to disturb us between eleven and twelve at night?"

"No offence, my good woman," answered the Barker: "but I just want to say a word to my friend—what's his name again?—Oh! Mr. Wilkins?"

"Then it's no use your coming here," replied the woman; "for Wilkins has gone, bag and baggage."

"Gone?" vociferated the Barker. "It's a lie—and I will see him! So stand aside——"

"Who says it's a lie?" demanded an old man—the woman's husband—popping forth his head, which had a white cotton night-cap on, from a side-door in the passage. "You hadn't left the house a minute before Mr. Wilkins went and fetched a cab, and took himself off with his traps paying us a week's rent instead of giving us a week's warning. Now you've got your answer: and so be off with you, or I'll call the police."

At that very instant the Barker beheld a constable appear within the rays of the lamp at the corner of the street; and with another lowly muttered but terrible imprecation, he hastened away. When beyond view of the policeman, the Barker paused to reflect upon the course which he should now pursue. The Jack Smedley had really robbed him, was only too evident; and instead of being in possession of a considerable sum of money, Barney was almost penniless. He not merely longed to get back his gold, but likewise to wreak a terrible vengeance on Jack Smedley. Suddenly a thought struck him. He advanced to the nearest cab-stand—drew the waterman aside—and putting a shilling into his hand, asked him whether such and such a person (describing Smedley according to his disguise) had fetched a vehicle from the rank within the last half

hour? The waterman replied in the affirmative; and he furthermore named the house to which the cab had gone to take up the individual's luggage. This was the house where Smedley had lodged, and therefore the waterman's tale was evidently correct. But the waterman was totally unable to afford a clue to the direction in which the cab had subsequently driven.

"But if so be you particularly want to know," added this functionary, "you've only to wait till the cabman comes back—and then you can learn all about it."

The Barker decided upon adopting the hint thus given; and he entered an adjacent public-house where the waterman promised to rejoin him immediately upon the return of the particular cabman whose presence was now required. The Barker, in a mood of savage sullenness, meditated the most desperate vengeance if he should only succeed in tracking out his false friend. Thus nearly an hour passed: Barney was growing desperately impatient; but at length the waterman made his appearance accompanied by the cabman, who had only just returned to his rank.

The Barker now ascertained that Jack Smedley had been driven in the cab to a street at the back of St. Luke's hospital in the Old Street Road—that he had alighted there, and had taken his luggage into a house the inmates of which were in bed at the time of his arrival, but had got up in obedience to his summons, and had given his admission with much apparent willingness. The Barker was compelled to give the cabman a shilling for this information; and then with his remaining coin he retained the man's services to take him up as far as St. Luke's Hospital. The church in Old Street proclaimed the hour of one just as the Barker alighted from the cab. He now pursued his way on foot; and in a few minutes reached the house which the cabman had accurately described to him. The Barker was totally ignorant of who the occupants of the dwelling might be: he felt tolerably well assured that they could not be what a turned respectable—or else under existing circumstances they would be no friends of Jack Smedley, supposing them to be acquainted with him; while on the other hand, if he were unknown to them, they would scarcely have admitted a stranger at such an hour. But that

seeming willingness on their part, to which the cabman had alluded, to afford Smedley a lodging, warranted the conclusion that they at least knew something of him.

The Barker's mind was soon made up how to act. He rang at the bell—for knocker there was none; and in a few minutes he heard footsteps approaching along the passage inside. An elderly man—with a candle in his hand; and only half dressed—appeared at the door; and very much astonished did he look at the singular aspect of the Barker, with the board and gaberdine.

"One word with you, my friend," said Barney in a low but peremptory tone; and he at once entered the passage.

"What does this mean?" demanded the man, affecting a look of indignation, though in reality he had a visible trouble depicted on his countenance.

A glance showed the Barker that the key was in the street door: he at once locked it—and taking out the key, said to the man, "You don't know me—eh?"

"No," was the response, nervously and tremblingly given.

"Then I'm a detective—that's what I am. You needn't stare at me after that fashion: it's a dress I've wore to look out for a chap that's wanted—and I've found him at last. I don't mean *you*—so you needn't look so glum: though if you've any of your nonsense or cause any obstruction, as the saying is, I shall precious soon walk you off. I've got half-a-dozen of my people in the street."

At this moment a woman, about a year or two younger than the man—both of whom were elderly—emerged from an adjoining room, with terror depicted upon her countenance; for she had evidently overheard all that the Barker had just been saying.

"I hope there's nothing strong, sir," she began in a voice of whimpering entreaty, "Me and my husband keep a respectable lodging-house—and though poor——"

"Well, I've no quarrel with you," interrupted the Barker; "but just show me the way to the room where you've lodged the person which arrived here just now in a cab."

The looks which the man and his wife exchanged, convinced the Barker that he was on the right track—that Smedley

was there—and that they moreover knew who he was.

"Come now, no nonsense!" he said: "but be quick—or it will be all the worse for you, I can promise!"

"Up-stairs—the back attic," said the man; and he presented the candle to the Barker.

"Now, I'm going to manage this little business without no noise," remarked the villain: "and so if you both hold your tongues, you'll find it the best way to keep out of trouble."

"I'm sure we're very much obliged to you, sir," said the woman; and if so be you'll take a drop of something to drink——"

"Presently," interrupted the Barker. "There; go into your own room—keep quiet—and leave me to manage. Do you think he can hear what we are saying?"

"I'm sure he can't," responded the man,—“unless he's come half-way down stairs for the purpose—which isn't likely. He wouldn't think anything particular of the door-bell ringing, because he knows what sort of a house it is."

The Barker now waved his hand for the elderly couple to retire into their room,—which they accordingly did,—both firmly convinced that their visitor was a detective in disguise. Barney, with the light in his hand, began ascending the stairs; and in a few moments he gained the top landing. Then, as he opened the door of the back attic, Smedley started up in his bed from a sound sleep,—giving vent to an ejaculation of terror on recognising the disguised Barker.

"Hold your tongue, you scoundrel!" growled Barney, as he entered the room and closed the door. "You sneaking, white-livered rascal!" he continued, in a voice which though low, was full of a deep savage concentrated rage; "did you think as how you could play your cursed pranks upon me?"

Jack Smedley was as ghastly as a ghost; while, as he sat up in bed, his hair was literally standing on end and his whole frame was quivering. He endeavoured to speak—but could not: he was a prey to all the terrible and horrifying dread which the appearance of so desperate a man as the Barker was under such circumstances but too well calculated to inspire.

"Now mark me, Jack Smedley," resumed the terrible Barney; "if I don't find every coin of my money safe among

your traps, I'll have your life though I'm owing for it to-morrow morning!"

"It is all there," gasped forth the miserable gold-beater; whose cowardice was only equalled by the wickedness of his disposition. "But pray don't hurt me—pray don't!"

"Hurt you?" echoed Barney; and he ground his teeth with ferocious rage.

"I did swear to myself just now that I would have your life; but if so be I get back my blunt, I'll leave you for the hangman. There never was such a dirty, sneaking, paltry scoundrel as you are in this blessed world! Why your wife Bob was always ashamed of you—always!—and I'm blowed if I think Jack Ketch himself would like to have to do with such a fellow!"

Smedley began to whimper and snivel; while the Barker, deliberately drawing forth his dreadful-looking clasp-knife, proceeded to cut the cords of the box which was in the attic. He opened it; he found all his money safe; and his eyes glistened with a savage joy as he resumed possession of his gold. He continued to ransack all the contents of the box; but he found therein nothing else worth taking.

"Where's your own money?" he demanded of Smedley. "Here, I suppose!" and he caught up the pantaloons which the gold-beater had been wearing, and which were lying over a chair.

There were six or seven sovereigns and a quantity of silver in the pocket; but Jack Smedley, now having the horrors of utter destitution before his eyes, began to moan so piteously that the Barker thought to himself, "He will do something desperate if I leave him penniless; and maybe he will blow the whole thing, turn round and peach and make a general smash of it. I'll play the generous towards him."

The Barker placed upon the table the money which he had just taken from the pocket of the pantaloons,—saying at the same time, "Leave off that precious moaning and whining—can't you, you fool! Or do you want me to slit your windpipe for you? Now look here, Jack—you're a thundering rascal, and you know you are: it would serve you right to leave you without a sherrick, as you meant to leave me. But I'll just give you another-chance; so I'll content myself with taking back my own. And now good-bye."

With these words, the *Burker* turned and quitted the attic,—while *Jack Smedley* felt so marvellously relieved by its disappearance, that the loss of the money he had meant to self-appropriate was now but a very secondary consideration. The *Burker* descended the stairs: he man and woman of the house issued forth from their room, wondering to hear only the footstaps of a single individual—for they had naturally expected that he supposed detective had come to take *Jack Smedley* into custody. The *Burker* did not however choose to volunteer any explanation: he ordered them both to go back into their own room and not bother him with their presence: and then opening the front door, he quitted the house.

CHAPTER CIX.

THE AYAH AND MR. REDOLIFFE.

It was in the afternoon of the day following that night's incidents which we have been relating; and *Mr. Redoliffe* proceeded to *Queen Indora's* villa. Having passed a couple of hours in her society he took his leave: but as he was issuing from the front-door, *Sagoonah*, who opened it for him, suddenly laid her hand upon his arm, and said in a low deep voice, "It is absolutely necessary I should have a few minutes' conversation with you."

Redoliffe stopped short in astonishment. For an instant the eyes of the Hindoo woman had shod upon him their burning light in that same manner which on three or four previous occasions had struck him as being so peculiar: but now, the next instant, her looks became full of a soft and earnest entreaty.

"What mean you *Sagoonah*?" he asked: "what can you have to say to me which may not be said in the presence of your mistress? Your request is so strange——"

"I beseech and implore that you will grant me a few minutes!" responded the ayah. "Oh! pray, pray do! Yonder—in the field at the extremity of the garden—I will be there in a few minutes! Oh, *Mr. Redoliffe*, refuse me not!"

She then hastily glided away; and *Mr. Redoliffe*, issuing from the villa, deliberated bewilderingly with himself as to the course which he ought to pursue. The haunting looks of *Sagoonah*

appeared to corroborate the idea that she had really something of importance to say to him; and he could at least see no harm in hearing what this might be. He accordingly decided upon keeping the appointment which she had just given him: and on quitting the grounds attached to the villa, he repaired to the field which was completely concealed by a screen of trees from the windows of *Queen Indora's* habitation. In a few minutes he beheld the white dress of *Sagoonah* at a short distance: at first she approached rapidly; but when within a few yards of him, she relaxed her pace and seemed to be smitten with confusion and timidity.

"What have you to fear, *Sagoonah*?" asked *Mr. Redoliffe*; "why is your manner thus strange? Draw near, and tell me for what purpose you besought this interview, and what important communication you may have to make to me?"

"I know not, sir," responded *Sagoonah*, in a low soft tremulous voice, "whether to sink down at your feet and speak as a slave—or whether to look you in the face and with the dignity of a woman address you."

"These are strange words," said *Mr. Redoliffe*, gazing intently upon the ayah in the hope of fathoming her purpose by the expression of her countenance. "You speak of slavery there is none in this country—at least not that species of slavery that you are thinking of. Even if there were, I should not claim such homage from you——"

"Ah! but, sir," interrupted *Sagoonah*, "if there be no slavery that is enacted or confirmed by law, there may nevertheless be a slavery in which the feelings or the passions enthrall the individual!"

"What mean you, *Sagoonah*?" ejaculated *Mr. Redoliffe*, who now appeared to catch a slight scintillation of the real truth: but the next instant he repudiated the suspicion from his mind as something preposterous or impossible. "What mean you?" he repeated.

The ayah advanced a little nearer towards him: there was moment's flashing of her brilliant burning eyes; and then the next instant they were veiled by her ebony lashes, and her looks were downcast. For a moment too it appeared as if she were really about to assert that womanly dignity of which she had spoken; but that as if she found it impossible to be maintained against the

influence of other and softer feelings which were agitating within her.

"Mr. Redcliffe," she said, in a voice that was again tumultuous, "I would fain consult you upon a point which closely and intimately concerns my happiness."

"But why not consult your kind-hearted mistress?" inquired Mr. Redcliffe. "She, Sagoonah, in the most fitting person to be made your confidante, and to proffer you such counsel as may be necessary under the circumstances."

"Oh, no sir!" exclaimed Sagoonah: "my mistress is the very last person whom I can consult!"

"And it is equally impossible that you can consult me," said Mr. Redcliffe coldly: for the varying confusion, hesitation, and embarrassment of the ayah—a moment's dignity being succeeded by minutes of tremulous bashfulness, and by a visible diffidence in coming to the point,—all these served to strengthen the suspicion which had previously entered the mind of Mr. Redcliffe.

"I am a stranger in a strange country," continued Sagoonah, now throwing a deep pathos into her tone; "and yet you refuse to become my counsellor—my adviser! Ah, sir! if this be the harbinger of that extreme cruelty which I am to experience at your hands when the revelation of my secret shall be fully made——"

"Listen to me, Sagoonah!" interrupted Mr. Redcliffe; and though he now spoke peremptorily, yet it was likewise with a certain degree of kindness: for he felt that after all his suspicion might be wrong; and being utterly without vanity or self-conceit, he could scarcely fancy it was correct. "It is not seemly for us to continue in conversation here: both your character and mine would suffer if we were observed. I do not mean to address you in harsh terms: but you are now at once to understand from my lips that without further hesitation on your part must you proceed to the communication you have to make me—Unless indeed, Sagoonah, you would rather that we should separate at once, and that we should both forget the occurrence of this private interview."

"Forget?" ejaculated Sagoonah, almost in accents of bitter scorn—not at Mr. Redcliffe himself, but at the idea as she had caught it up. "Forget? No—it is impossible! Never can I forget aught that is connected with you! And

now you have my secret," she exclaimed for a moment flinging her burning regards upon him: then, as the next instant they were again veiled in their dark fringes, she added in a low voice, "I love you!"

Mr. Redcliffe first felt inclined to give vent to expressions of anger and indignation; and this he would assuredly have done if dealing with an English woman who sought to set herself up as a rival to Queen Indora and tempt or beguile him away from that plighted which he had made her and from that truth by which he now considered himself so solemnly bound. But a second thought made him reflect that it was a Hindoo woman who stood before him—one who belonged to a distant and different clime—whose thoughts and whose notions were as distinct as the habits and customs of that clime itself from those of displaying anger or scorn. Mr. Redcliffe considered it alike more prudent and more generous to reason with Sagoonah.

"I will not pretend," he said, "to doubt the seriousness with which you have made that avowal, inasmuch as I cannot for a moment suppose that you would stoop to such miserable trifling. But it is impossible, Sagoonah, that you can entertain the slightest hope——"

"Hope, sir?" she murmured. "Love itself is hope! Of one thing I am certain:—you love not Queen Indora, although you have promised to espouse her! Then wherefore may I not hope that you will yet learn to love me?"

"If I were to tell you," Sagoonah replied Mr. Redcliffe, with a deep mournfulness in his tone and a profound compassion in his looks, "that the power of love is dead within me, you perhaps would not understand my meaning. But let me address you on another subject. What is your age? You are in your twenty-sixth year—with all the vigour of youthfulness—still young——and I do not mean to compliment you when I say that you are beautiful. I am three or four years past forty; but through care and grief my appearance is that of a still older man. Whatever personal beauty I may have once possessed, is gone——"

"You forget, sir," interrupted Sagoonah gently, "that I have known you for many years——yes, from my very girlhood have I known you! Was I not from a child brought up in the palace of Indorabad?—and think you not, therefore, my memory retains your image?"

"I first knew you?—so that even while I now look upon you, I fail to observe whatsoever ravages time or other circumstances may have wrought upon you. You were the first European whom I ever beheld; and therefore from my very girlhood was there all the interest of novelty in my mind;—and is it surprising that such interest should have expanded and ripened into another feeling? Oh, sir!" continued Sagoonah enthusiastically, "my brain is stored with memories in respect to yourself!—memories which I have cherished and which I have upon as the most delicious of food! Ah, imagination transports me back to the spacious halls and marble courts of Inderabad. I see myself a girl of fifteen or sixteen, seated by the side of a fountain—and you approach—you speak kindly to me—you tell me of the far-off land from which you came—this land where I now find myself, and which at the time I so little dreamt I should ever visit! And I see you walking as it were in all the pride and glory of your own civilization, amidst the comparative barbarism of that native clime of mine! I hear those around me speaking of wise and liberal measures ordained by the King; I hear your name mentioned with admiration—for full well is it known that from the suggestions of your wisdom do those measures emanate! Oh, I am a young girl again—I am roving through the gardens and the marble courts of Inderabad: I already love you—my admiring looks follow you, though you perceive them not: I look up to you as a superior being that has come down amidst the immeasurable inferiority of that people to whom I belong!"

It was with a strange and wild exaltation that Sagoonah spoke—an exaltation fervid, glowing, and rapturous; and if Mr. Redcliffe had eyes and a heart to be smitten with the grand spectacle of that Hindoo woman's darkly splendid beauty, he could not have failed to be stricken *then*! The supernal lustre of her eyes shed a halo of animation upon her countenance: her supple, willowy form yielded in eloquent gestures and graceful attitudes to the varying tenour of her discourse; the quick heavings of her bosom gave visible undulations to the snow-white drapery which covered it: while her arms, bare to the shoulders—so admirably modelled though of dusky skin—played their part with a grace all

natural and unstudied in those gesticulations which gave such force to her language, half pathetic, half passionate.

"Sagoonah," said Mr. Redcliffe, "I ought not to have tarried to listen to such discourse as this; and if you were an English-woman, our interview would have been cut short almost at the instant it commenced—or perhaps, I should rather say that it would not have been granted at all! But once more I conjure you to listen to me attentively. Either you mean that I am to prove faithless to the vow I have plighted to your mistress, and receive yourself as a wife? or else you intend me to remain faithful to that plight in some sense, but to abandon myself to the temptation of an illicit love with you? In either case you are acting most improperly; you are outraging the loftiness of that very female dignity of which you ere now spoke: you are behaving ungratefully to the mistress who has ever been so kind and indulgent towards you. Do you not comprehend me, Sagoonah? Will you not promise that you will stifle this infatuation which you have been cherishing, and that never more henceforth will you address me in such terms? You see that I do not reproach you: I speak kindly to you—and surely, surely your better feelings must be touched—your good sense must make you aware of the truth of all I am telling you?"

"If you possess an enchanter's power," responded Sagoonah, "give me back my freedom of the heart—release me from the spells with which you have enthralled me—pluck out from my brain all the memories of the past—tear away from my soul that image which has become as it were interwoven with my own existence! If you can do all this Mr. Redcliffe, *then* indeed may we separate at once and I may faithfully promise never more to address you in the language which I have been holding! Oh, think not that I am unaware of the desperate—the well-nigh hopeless condition in which I am placed with regard to you! But my feelings are stronger than myself; and I have no more power to crush this love of mine than you have to bid it be crushed. Is it not therefore vain to talk to me of duties and proprieties? is it not useless to remind me of the kind indulgence of a good mistress—aye, and all the more so," she added, in a voice which suddenly became low, and which had deeper meaning in it

than Mr. Redcliffe could fathom at the time,—“aye, and all the more so inasmuch as I feel that I have sinned against her too deeply to leave room for repentance!”

“But, Sagoonah,” said Mr. Redcliffe, now adopting a sterner look and a more peremptory tone, “it is absolutely necessary that you should exercise a becoming control over your feelings. I do not love you—I cannot love you! Whatsoever influence you may hope, think, or seek to exercise over me, would only be a tyranny against which I should rebel; and I do not wish to speak too harshly—but still I must add that if it went too far I should punish it! Your good sense must tell you that were I to breathe in the ear of your mistress a single syllable of all that has now taken place, she would not retain you in her service. Be reasonable therefore—”

“Be reasonable?” echoed Sagoonah, her eyes flashing fire, and her entire form writhing as if with the sense of an insult. “Who are you that bid the flames which you have excited suddenly quench themselves? Can you command the volcano to cease its heaving and be still? How then think you that you can exercise such a power over the human heart? No, Clement Redcliffe! it is you who are most unreasonable. I am but a poor weak woman—you are a strong man; and it is *you* who are playing the tyrant towards *me*! You are now asked me what my purpose was and what my hope is? Listen—No, do not interrupt me! I insist upon speaking in my turn—and it is my turn now! Since I left Inderabad I have learned much of the world—I have looked upon it in a new light—I have studied it—I know it. Well aware am I of the immeasurable distance which exists between myself and you—of the great gulf which social distinctions have established between us. Think not, therefore, that I seek to become your wife! No—but I will become your slave, and to be your slave is to be your mistress—the toy with whom you may play—the object that may gratify a passing phantasy. But you must renounce the vow which you have plodged to Indora—”

“Sagoonah!” ejaculated Mr. Redcliffe angrily.

“Listen—listen!” cried the Hindoo woman vehemently: and she stamped her foot with excitement. “You shall hear me to the end: I was saying, therefore, that you must renounce your vow

to become the husband of Indora, diadem awaits her:—surely, surely I can leave to her humble slave the happiness of the heart’s love? And, Oh! thin not, Mr. Redcliffe, that if you really loved Indora, I would insist upon such a sacrifice as this! No: I should have mercy upon you—because alas! I know what it is to love. It is really no sacrifice that I am demanding on your part. You seek not for worldly honour nor earthly titles: You care not for that Sovereign dignity with which the sharer of Queen Indora’s throne would become invested. Ah! you see that I comprehend you in disposition well. Then, after all, what is it that I ask? That you will no marry where you do not love—but that you consent to receive a slave and a mistress where you are beloved?”

“And all this, Sagoonah, is an impossibility,” said Mr. Redcliffe. I have endeavoured to reason with you—and you will not be reasonable. You now compel me to speak out the full truth sternly—and you may think implacably. Nevertheless, it must be done. Return you to your mistress: for here our interview ends. I shall call at the villa tomorrow; and by your demeanour shall I be decided whether I retain the seal of silence on my lips—or whether I must perform a duty by explaining to Queen Indora everything that has taken place. Do not regard me as an enemy, Sagoonah: I would rather be your friend! I have made all possible allowances for you—”

“No, sir—you have not!” interrupted Sagoonah vehemently. “The poor Hindoo woman has her feelings as well as the haughtiest lady of your civilized British land. Mine are wounded. Think you that I have no virtue? I think you that I value not my chastity and my honour? The former is immaculate—the latter untarnished. Yet do I offer to sacrifice my virtue for your sake. Judge thereby the strength of my love! And is such a love as this to be subdued by a cold mandate to be reasonable? Is it something to be crushed like this!—and setting her foot upon a wild flower, she trampled it down, half disdainfully, half vehemently.

“Sagoonah, I must leave you,” said Mr. Redcliffe: and he was turning away.

“No—our interview ends not thus!” interrupted Sagoonah; and bounding forward, she caught him by the arm. “You know not what it is to trifle with

no feelings of a woman—thus to scorn her love—to refuse the slightest sacrifice on your part! Such a love as mine is capable of turning into the deadliest hate. I need not remind you that I belong not to the same cold clime as you—”

“Sagoonah, all (this is ridiculous!” interrupted Mr. Redcliffe. “If you were an Englishwoman, I should conceive that your brain was turned by witnessing the outrageous details of some highly wrought melo-drama—or that you had stocked your brain with phrases from some preposterous romance. I now insist that this may end; and remember that it is yourself who are the cause that I am speaking thus harshly!”

Sagoonah drew back; and for a few instants she contemplated Mr. Redcliffe in so singular a manner that he was utterly at a loss to fathom what was passing in her mind. It seemed as if the intense fervour of love were about to turn into hate—as if the fire which burnt in her eyes, expressed a passion of one kind that might in a moment flame up into another. But then, blended with all that, there was an expression of mingled compassion and anguish upon her countenance; and she looked, too, as if she still so far clung to hope that she would not yield to the desperation which might make her take some step impossible to be recalled. In a word, the ayah's countenance at that moment was a tablet of the wildest contradictions: the traces of her feelings were there—but they were hieroglyphics impossible to be deciphered.

“Mr. Redcliffe,” said Sagoonah, all the fire of her eyes suddenly yielding to a deep and mournful pathos, “you will not doom me to utter misery! Oh, do not—do not! Is there naught that I can do for you? Set me the most impossible of tasks—and I will even achieve the impossible! Put my love to the test—you shall find that it will pass through the ordeal! Will you not have mercy upon me? Look upon me as a woman standing upon the brink of a precipice, and whom one touch of your hand may hurl over into the abyss, or bring back to a position of safety. Oh, my brain is turning! I feel as if I were going mad! Have mercy upon me!”

Sagoonah sank at Mr. Redcliffe's feet: she pressed her hands to her brow—she gave vent to convulsive sobs. She appeared as if distracted.

“I pity you, my poor Sagoonah,” he said, bending down to raise: “but beyond that feeling of compassion—”

“Oh! such a love as mine,” interrupted the ayah, strongly emphasizing her words, “is not to be satisfied with mere compassion! Mr. Redcliffe, give me your love—or at least accept mine! But refuse me, and beware lest your scorn suddenly arm me with the venom of a serpent!”

“Sagoonah,” answered Mr. Redcliffe, “I can now keep no terms with you: for I see that there is evil in your disposition. A woman who can speak as you have just spoken, must be prepared for any extreme, however desperate. It is my duty to report everything to your mistress—”

Again Sagoonah flung herself upon her knees, exclaiming, “No—not spare me! be merciful unto me! I spoke at random! Oh! not for a moment—no not for moment would I dream of executing whatsoever menace in my despair was thrown out!”

“Well, then, I consent to pardon you,” said Mr. Redcliffe. “Yes, I will pardon you. But it is only on this condition—that never henceforth, by word nor even by look—”

“I understand you, sir,” interrupted Sagoonah; “and I thank you for this mercy which you are vouchsafing unto me!”—then as she slowly rose up from her suppliant posture, with an expression of countenance which was singularly calm and placid after all the excitement she had just displayed, she said, “Farewell, Mr. Redcliffe. Pray forget, as you have promised to forgive, whatsoever has now taken place.”

“I will, Sagoonah—I will both forgive and forget,” responded Mr. Redcliffe; “and let me sincerely hope that your reflections in your calmer moments will lead you henceforth to be completely reasonable.”

“They will, sir—rest assured that they will,” rejoined Sagoonah, with an air of the deepest meekness; and then with the low obeisance of a slave, she turned away from the spot.

At first she proceeded slowly: and if Mr. Redcliffe could only have seen how ominous were the fires which flashed forth from her large dark eyes, his confidence in the assurances she had just given him would have been shaken, if not altogether dispelled. In a few moments she quickened her pace, and

glided back into the grounds of the villa. Then Mr. Redcliffe, who had lingered on the spot to follow her with his regards, took his own departure.

CHAPTER CX.

THE BORROWED COSTUME.

THE dusk had now closed completely in; and Sagoonah, on regaining the villa, at once ascended to her own chamber. There she sat down to give way to her meditations.

"Did I not almost foresee it he?" thought within herself: "was I not incessantly haunted by the idea that he would scorn my love?—did I not continuously entertain the dread that it were impossible to thaw that frozen heart of his? It has been done—the attempt has been made—it has failed! It were madness to renew it! But now, what remains for me? A hopeless love—or a signal vengeance! Hopeless love? Ah, no! That were cherishing a serpent to gnaw continuously at my heart's core!—that were to surround this very heart of mine with red hot coals and fan them into an incessant blaze. I could not live thus! But vengeance? Ah! and it will not be vengeance on *one* only—but likewise on her to whom he has plighted his troth!"

Sagoonah arose from her seat and paced three or four times to and fro in her chamber. Her better feelings were maintaining a severe struggle against the agitation of the darkest passions of her soul: for she had truly and fondly loved Clement Redcliffe—and the blow which she meditated against him would, she thought, be crushing—overwhelming: it would be death—and yet not death to be inflicted by her own hand!

"Yes, I will do it!" she suddenly ejaculated within herself: "I will do it! I must have vengeance for this slighted love of mine—And besides, even apart from vengeance, I must do that which will effectually prevent him from ever becoming the husband of the Queen. Oh, to serve him as a slave—I who love him so madly!—to behold him in the arms of another—and that other whom I have so long hated as my rival!—No, no: I could not endure it! Oh, I will have vengeance—and my purpose shall be strong to wreak it! There shall now be

no more feebleness with me. Did I not arm myself with the courage requisite to plant a dagger in the bosom of Indora! did I not even snatch forth the venomous reptile from its cage? did I not place it in her couch? And if circumstances were hostile to my aims—if those ventures of mine terminated in failure—was it through any lack of courage on my part? No, no! I was bold for all those terrible purposes of mischief;—and shall I prove myself weak now?"

Sagoonah stood in the middle of the chamber as she thus gave way to her sinister reflections; and when her mind was completely made up, she asked herself a final question. It was whether she did verily and truly possess the strength of mind that was requisite for the carrying out of her purpose;—and she answered herself in the affirmative.

"Now away to a magistrate," she said, "to give the information and strike the blow without farther delay! Ah, Christina Ashton, you little thought wherefore you found me so ready a pupil in studying under your tuition the accurate reading of the English language! You little suspected wherefore you discovered me bending with so much earnestness over that huge file of the English newspapers! And now I am about to turn my knowledge to an account—aye, and I know how to set about it! It is but to enter one of the public vehicles, and order the driver to take me to the dwelling of the nearest magistrate!"

Sagoonah was about to issue from the chamber, when she caught sight of herself in a mirror which she passed: and she stopped short.

"This dress," she said to herself, "betrays the poor Hindoo slave: and it may prevent me from obtaining admission to the presence of the magistrate. Ah! I have read how difficult of access are some of the high functionaries of this country—and how much depends upon the appearance and condition of those who seek an interview with them! Were it Queen Indora herself, with her rich apparel, every lace-bedizened lacquey would bow—every door would fly open—and amidst profoundest salutations would she be ushered into the presence of whomsoever amongst England's dignitaries she thus sought out. But I—the humble slave—Oh, it will be different with me? And then too, even if I succeeded in obtaining such an interview,

my tale would not be believed : I should be treated with scorn and ridicule. What am I to do?"

And again the Hindoo woman sat down to deliberate within herself: but it was not very long.

"If I do this," she went on reflecting, "dare I return to the villa? Will it not be known that from me the information was obtained. Besides, if I start forth now, it will be two or three hours before I could return: my absence would be remarked--and when the blow should smite him almost at the very same time, Indora's suspicions would at once point to myself as the source whence it emanated. I must therefore bid an eternal farewell to this house and my mistress. Aye--and why not? Everything for vengeance! Nor need I go away empty-handed. And, Ah! I will apparel myself in a style that shall insure my admission into the presence of the magistrate whom I am about to seek."

Having thus settled all her proceedings in her mind, Sagoonah assumed a calm expression of countenance, and descended on some pretext to the drawing-room. She there found Queen Indora and Christina seated together, and engaged in conversation. Almost immediately afterwards Christian Ashton called at the villa, to pass an hour with his sister and the Queen; and Sagoonah felt satisfied that she had now ample leisure for the execution of her purpose.

Indora had worn during the earlier part of the day that same apparel--half European in its fashion, and half Oriental in its style--which she had worn on the preceding day: but she had changed that dress for an evening costume, according to her wont, when she performed her toilet for dinner. This semi-English, semi-Eastern garb which she had put off, as we have just said, lay upon the couch in Indora's chamber. That chamber was now entered by Sagoonah, who lost no time in appareling herself in the dress which she thus found upon the bed; and from the Queen's jewel-caskets she took many valuables, as well as a large sum in gold and bank notes which she found in a writing desk that happened to be unlocked. Concealing this wealth about her person Sagoonah flung a thick and costly veil over her head. A few minutes afterwards she issued noiselessly forth from the front door of the villa. The evening had closed in; but it was a

beautiful clear one--and all objects were plainly visible in the flood of argentine lustre which poured down from a cloudless sky.

We must for a brief space leave Sagoonah, just as she is beginning to glide through the garden attached to the villa; and we must return to an individual of whom indeed we have very recently spoken. This was Barney the Barker.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon of the day of which we are writing--and which was the one following his adventures with old Jonathan Carnab's and with Jack Smedley--the Barker bent his steps a second time towards Queen Indora's villa. He was habited in his Jewish garb which we have already described, and which was indeed a most effectual disguise against the peering vision of even the keenest sighted officer of justice. The dense foliage of evergreens, shrubs, and trees which embowered so large a portion of the grounds attached to the villa, afforded the Barker an easy opportunity of penetrating into the enclosure unperceived by any of the inmates of the dwelling. He concealed himself in the midst of that clump which was in the immediate vicinity of the fountain, and which had afforded him a hiding-place on the preceding day.

Presently he beheld Indora walking through the grounds, in company with a gentleman whom he instantaneously recognised. This was the one who had pursued him almost to his capture at Woodbridge, when he had saved himself by plunging into the river,--the same too whom he had seen on the preceding evening at Mr. Chubb's front door. But the Barker was ignorant that the gentleman bore the name of Clement Redcliffe. Queen Indora was then apparelled in the same costume in which the Barker had seen her on the preceding day: namely, the semi-English, semi-Eastern garb, of which we have been speaking. He was not long in perceiving that she gazed with tenderness on her companion: he saw that she loved him. At first the magnificent beauty of the Queen produced upon the Barker an almost overpowering influence similar to that which he experienced on the previous day: but this gradually wore off, as in his ambush he reflected on the absolute necessity there was for him to accomplish the task assigned by the Duke of Marchmont, and read those rewards which were to be the

price of his iniquity. Besides, the Barker hated Mr. Redcliffe, against whom he entertained a bitter spite on account of the affair at Woodbridge; and he conceived that by fulfilling the Duke of Marchmont's mission in respect to Indora, he should be at the same time wreaking his vengeance on her companion. Thus was it that the miscreant was on the present occasion nerved with all his wanted satanic energies for a purpose of tremendous mischief.

But Mr. Barnes by no means intended to perpetrate the crime while Indora was walking with one who even if he did not prove a protector, might at least serve as a defender. He thought it very probable that Indora might presently remain alone in the garden; at all events he determined to wait. His hiding-place was deeply embowered in foliage; he was buried amidst laurels and bays; and when the dusk should be closing in, that ambush would be perfectly impenetrable.

There were a few moments, however, when the Barker experienced a mortal terror: for a stray dog, entering the grounds, began barking violently in the immediate vicinity of the spot where Barney was concealed. With what bitter imprecations did the miscreant curse the yelping cur! and with what infinite satisfaction would he have driven his long clasp knife into the brute's body! The animal stood upon the edge of the border in the midst of which the evergreens were planted,—barking with all its might: so that the circumstance speedily attracted the notice of Queen Indora and Mr. Redcliffe. They advanced close up to the spot: for a moment the Barker dreaded lest Mr. Redcliffe should make a minute inspection of the place: but immense was the miscreant's relief when that gentleman contented himself with merely driving the animal away.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Redcliffe took his leave of Queen Indora; and then followed the interview between himself and Sagoona which has already been described. But in the meantime Barney the Barker continued in his ambush. He had often waited hours for an opportunity to accomplish some deed of evil; he was by no means likely to abandon his present enterprise, so long as there might by any probability be a chance of achieving it on this occasion. Besides, as well for him to remain an hour or two more in a place where his safety was comparatively secured, than to go

wandering about the bye-streets of the metropolis, or sit down in some public house, with the chance of being recognised and captured.

The time passed—the shades of evening fell: but as the stars came out and the weather was so mild and beautiful, the Barker thought to himself he would tarry yet a little longer in case Indora should by chance come forth to take another ramble.

Presently his ear caught the rustling of a dress at no great distance; he listened with suspended breath: nearer it came—he heard the flowing skirt of the costume sweeping over the grass, and then brushing by some plant overhanging the border. The Barker peeped forth; and the next instant his hand clutched his clasp-knife—for he felt assured that it was Indora of whom he caught sight. Yea—the very same costume which he had seen her wear that day and on the preceding one!—and though the veil was now over her head, yet was it evident beyond all possibility of doubt that this was his intended victim!

All of a sudden there was a rush from amidst the trees: a faint shriek escaped the lips of the veiled one; but in the twinkling of an eye the weapon which the miscreant held was buried deep in the victim's bosom. Down she fell without another cry—with only a low brief moan: and at that very instant the Barker was alarmed by the sounds of footsteps approaching from behind the clump of evergreens that had formed his ambush. He darted away—plunged amongst the trees at the farther extremity of the garden—climbed the fence—and gained the adjoining fields.

After making a long circuit, the Barker re-entered London somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Edgware Road. It was now ten o'clock; and as he passed along at a moderate pace, he said to himself, "At eleven punctual every night!—that was the agreement! I shall be in plenty of time; and if so be I wasn't, his Grace would not be pertikler to a minit or two."

Mr. Barnes remembered that inasmuch as he was personating a Jew of venerable appearance, with a long black gaberdine and a grey beard, he must not proceed too quickly, for fear lest the eye of some detective should settle its glance upon him.

"It's a burning shame," said the miscreant within himself, "that one can't walk through the streets of London without standing the chance of having the looks of impertinent curiosity riveted on one's self."

As he thus mused upon his wrongs, the Barker pursued his way; and on looking at the clock in baker's shop which was not yet shut up, he found that he had a good half-hour's leisure before keeping the appointment on which he was bent. He therefore resolved to procure some refreshment: for many hours had elapsed since either food or drink had passed his lips. He entered a low public-house which he knew of old, but when he was tolerably certain he would not be recognised in the costume he now wore. There were five or six villainous-looking ruffians drinking in the tap-room, which was clouded with tobacco smoke; and the Barker, shrinking with all a Jew's wanted timidity, into the obscurest corner, kept his countenance as much averted as possible, while he ate the bread and cheese and drank the beer which he had ordered. A rapid glance swept over the company, had made him aware that two or three of the men were personally known to him: but it by no means suited his intentions to reveal himself or claim their acquaintance. The company, on their part, were not particularly surprised with the presence of one whom they took to be a Jew: for at that public-house of which we are speaking there was at times a congregation of a variety of characters. Nevertheless the conversation was temporarily suspended and the Barker entered and glided into the corner; but it was speedily renewed again.

"Well, what about that there business, then, Toby?" inquired one of the men thus addressing a companion.

"Why, you see, Tummas," was the response, "he made the old fellow as drunk as a fiddler, and no doubt hocussed his grog."

"Yes—you told us that just now," interrupted the individual who had previously spoken. "But did they know as how it was the Barker?—My eyes! what a gulp of heavy wet that old Jew has just took!" he added, in a lowered voice.

"How did they know it was the Barker?" proceeded Toby. "Why because when the old feller came to himself this morning, he recalled to mind everything

wot had took place; and then he recollected the particular way in which his friend of the previous night had spoke and wot a rum sort of lingo he had. He even wondered it hadn't struck him at the time: but having no suspicion, and thinking as how it was all right and that he had got into uncommon good and respectable company, it wasn't much to be wondered at if the old feller was thrown completely off his guard."

"And how did you hear all this, Toby?" inquired one of the company: "how did you get old of it, old chap? Tell us."

"Cos why I know's summat of Chubb's servant-gal—and she told me all about it. There is a gentleman which goes to see the old man—Carnabie that's his name again; and this gentleman, it seems called at the house last night just at the very moment Barney the Barker was leaving it."

"Well, and I s'pose the traps have had the office tipped 'em, eh?"

"Ah! you may be pretty sure of that," responded Toby: "but it was all done in a very snug and quiet way, so that the business might not get into the papers" for this Carnabie is a parish clerk somewhere down in the country—and of course it would not be respectable for such an old file to be knowed to get himself so stupid drunk and to make such a fool of himself."

"Ah! the Barker's a clever cove," said another of the company, "What a hand he must be at a disguise! Blow me, what a hand!"

"I should have knowed him," exclaimed the man who answered to the name of Toby. "There's never a disguise that he could have put on so good as to prevent me from twigging on him."

Here the Barker, having finished his refreshments, though he had heard enough: but he had very little fear indeed of being recognised by Toby, notwithstanding all the fellow's boasting. Indeed, exhilarated by the malt liquor he had imbibed, the miscreant chuckled inwardly at the opportunity of thus putting the boaster to the test; and rising from his seat, he walked more slowly through the room than when he had entered it. Toby stared at him, but only with a passing curiosity—and not with the faintest suspicion: so that, the Barker issued from the public-house chuckling even more blithely than before.

CHAPTER CXI.

THE LIBRARY.

He now continued his way towards Pimlico; and he entered a narrow and somewhat obscure street, just as a neighbouring church clock was striking eleven. One side of the street was formed by a wall belonging to the grounds of some mansion: and trees overhung the iron railing which fenced, the top of this wall. In the shade of these trees the Barker beheld a gentleman lounging along, and smoking a cigar as if with the ease of a rakish idleness. This personage was the Duke of Marchmont; and the Barker, according to him, said, "Good evening, my lord."

"Who are you?" demanded the Duke with haughty outness: but when the Barker burst out into a coarse though half-subdued chuckle, the nobleman exclaimed, "What! is it possible?—you in this disguise."

"Yes, my lord: it's my own worry identical self," responded the Barker. "There's been a little shifting of toggeroy as your Grace perceives——"

"But the business—the mission I entrusted to you?" interrupted the Duke, anxiously and nervously.

"It's done, my lord," was the response chucklingly given.

"Done! Is it possible?" and there was a mingled exultation and terror in the Duke's tone.

"If it wasn't done, my lord," said the Barker, "what the deuce should I be here for? Didn't your Grace tell me to meet you somewhere about this spot at eleven o'clock on any night that I might have summat good to communicate?"

"Yes, yes—true!" ejaculated the Duke, who experienced a bewildering sensation—half in joy at being rid of a dangerous foe (as he thought)—and half in terror lest this new crime should engender new sources of apprehension.

"And now, your Grace, for the reward," said the Barker. "Short reckonings makes long friends."

"We cannot possibly converse here," interrupted the Duke. "Follow me!—but follow me at a distance!"

With these words Marchmont turned abruptly round, and bent his steps towards Belgrave Square,—an occasional glance thrown over his shoulder, showing him that the disguised Barker was following upon his track.

THERE was a grand entertainment at the Duke of Marchmont's house in Belgrave Square—on the evening of which we are writing. The reader is aware that the Duchess of Marchmont was an amiable and beautiful lady, but who unfortunately had experienced little happiness in her alliance with the Duke. She had forgiven him for that fearful conspiracy which he had concocted against her some time back at Oakland; but though she had forgiven, she could not forget. Yet with the natural generosity of her nature—with the self-sacrificing magnanimity of her disposition—she had studied to resume her wonted demeanour of affectionate regard towards her husband, and likewise to play the part which her high station assigned her in a manner that should prevent the world from suspecting her domestic infelicity. Thus was it that she from time to time gave those entertainments which a lady in her sphere was expected to give: while, on the other hand, the Duke, who to a certain extent studied outward appearances, intimated his pleasure that such receptions should take place at Marchmont House.

Especially, too, at the present time was his Grace anxious to court society and to seem to have his leisure occupied by dinner-party and other fashionable pursuits. When a man in either meditating or darkly conniving at a crime, he takes all possible precautions to avert suspicion, and to afford proof that his thoughts and aims were following at the time in altogether a different channel. Thus, at this period when he was in reality devoured with anxiety and suspense as to the result of the terrible task he had assigned to the Barker, he appeared to be pursuing a round of pleasure, and was giving splendid entertainments at his mansion in Belgrave Square.

On the evening of which we are speaking, there had been a dinner-party at Marchmont House; and the saloons were afterwards thrown open for the reception of a fashionable assemblage. Dancing commenced in one room; the card-tables were speedily occupied in another. The Duchess of Marchmont assumed a gay and cheerful aspect; though her heart

was inwardly a prey to the never-ceasing sense of neglect and ill-treatment--yes, even hatred which she had experienced on the part of her husband. The Duke likewise dissembled the real state of his own feelings--but for a far different motive: and when he passed through his sumptuously furnished and brilliantly lighted rooms--an if with the zeal of a host who is careful to see that his guests are surrounded by all possible hospitalities--frequent was the whispered remark to the effect "that this Grace had for a long time seemed so cheerful nor performed his part so affably as on the present occasion."

A little before eleven o'clock the Duke of Marchmont had slipped away from the midst of the gay throng, and throwing on an overcoat, had issued forth by the back part of the premises to proceed to the place of appointment which he had arranged with the Barker. They met, as we have already described; and we left them bending their steps towards Belgrave Square--the Duke leading the way--his assassin accomplice following at a little distance.

The Duke stopped at a door in a wall which bounded the back part of the spacious stabling establishment attached to Marchmont House: and opening that door by means of a key which he had with him, he waited till the Barker came up. He then conducted the villain through all that department of the premises, and led him unseen by any of the domestics into the library. Wax candles were burning there: for it was usual to light up any part of the spacious establishment which his Grace might think fit to visit. There was a screen at the lower extremity, which partially concealed one of the windows, whence a draught had lately been observed to emanate; and at the instant that the door opened to admit the Duke and the Barker, a female figure glided behind that screen. The dress, as well as the window-draperies, rustled for a moment: but neither the nobleman nor the assassin heard the sounds, which were indeed slight and transient. The Duke locked the door; and throwing himself upon a seat, said in an anxious voice, "Now tell me all that has occurred."

"It's short and sweet, my lord," replied the Barker; "and I've no doubt will give your Grace the utmost satisfaction. Yesterday I kept watch in the garden of the lady's villa: but I had no

opportunity of striking the blow. On the other hand I had plenty of time to admire her beauty; and I don't mind telling your lordship that it well nigh unsettled me altogether. Well, my lord, circumstances last night made me change my disguise: and now I'll just ask your Grace's candid opinion which suits me best and which I look most genteel in!"

"A truce to this nonsense!" interrupted the Duke impatiently. "Proceed, I am in a hurry."

"All right my lord," resumed the Barker. "This afternoon I returned to the villa: and I soon saw her ladyship walking in her garden. She had company with her: and so I was again compelled to wait. But after a while she came out to walk alone, and then I drove my good clasp-knife so deep into her buzzin that she dropped down with scarce a groan."

"This is true?--you are not deceiving me?" said the Duke, quivering with anxious suspense. "How am I to know that you have done this?"

"Send and inquire if you like, my lord," answered the Barker with brutal flippancy, "Or I'll be bound to say you'll read all about it in to-morrow morning's paper."

"And you are certain that the blow was surely dealt?" demanded the Duke.

"Look you, my lord," responded the Barker, drawing out his clasp-knife. "This blade is a long one; it went right down to the handle: here's the mark of blood upon it; and here's my anker-sher, which I wiped it on as I rushed away from the spot."

"Enough!" ejaculated the Duke, averting his eyes from the sickening evidences of the crime which had been committed at his instigation.

"I hadn't failed to observe that the Lady Indocra--or whatever her name was continued the assassin. "Walked about with the whole contents of a jeweller's shop crowded on her person and dress; and I *did* mean to help myself to a few of them trifles. But just after the blow was struck, I heard foot steps coming from the direction of the villa; and as the lady had given a sort of skreek when I first busted out upon her, I in course thought it had been heard indoors and the servants was a coming to see what it all meant. So I'd only just time to draw out my clasp-knife from the wound--which was a

precious deep one, I know!—and then I scud away as fast as my legs could carry me. Now your Grace knows everything; and you may give me my reward."

The Duke was in the act of drawing forth his purse—which was crammed with gold and bank-notes—when a strange rustling noise, apparently coming from behind the screen or the closed draperies of one of the windows, fell upon the ears of both himself and the Barker. They started up with dismay in their looks: but this feeling was expressed with a far more ghastly and horror-stricken aspect on the part of the nobleman than on that of the assassin. For a few instants the Duke stood irresolute—a prey to the most agonizing torture: then rushing towards the screen dashed it aside—seized upon the window draperies and tore them asunder. A faint shriek rang forth; and he beheld a lady who was a total stranger to him. An ejaculation of ferocious rage dropped from the lips of the Barker: and his hand was already clutching his clasp-knife,—when the lady fell upon her knees, murmuring "For heaven's sake spare me! spare me—I beseech you! Your secret is safe!"

"Horror at all that she had heard, and wild terror at the menacing aspect of the Barker, were blended in her looks. The Duke of Marchmont was well nigh distracted; all the most frightful perils appeared to be environing him: his brain grew dizzy—sight became dim—he reeled back a few paces, as if intoxicated with wine.

"Dismiss this dreadful man!—for heaven's sake send him away!" said the lady accosting the Duke with looks that in terror appealed to him, while with horror they shrank from the ferocious gaze of the Barker. "I have heard nothing—I mean," she continued confusedly, and in a dreadfully excited manner, "I will keep silent—I will not betray anything—no not for the world!"

Encouraged by this assurance, and roused to sudden energy by the desperation of the horrible circumstances in which he found himself placed, the Duke of Marchmont quickly drew forth his purse and a key: and he said to the Barker, "Here—depart! There is more than the reward I promised! Let yourself out by the way that we came! For heaven's sake lose not an instant! Away with you!—get out of London—leave England at once—immediately."

These injunctions were issued in low, hoarse, but hurried whisper; and hastening to unlock the door of the library, the Duke pushed the Barker thence. The miscreant, judging by the weight and the feel of the purse that on end was heavy with gold and the other crammed with bank-notes, had no reason to tarry any longer; and he succeeded in effecting his exit from the premises without being observed by any of the dependants.

The Duke of Marchmont was left alone with this lady who was unknown to him. He looked the door again; and accosting her with a countenance that was ghastly pale, and in a voice that was now hollow with deeply concentrated emotions which horror was predominant, he said, "Who are you? and how came you here?"

The lady, who was evidently much relieved by the disappearance of the Barker, and who was naturally of a courageous disposition—lost by this time fully recovered her own presence of mind; and she said, "My lord—you have nothing to fear. I know everything; I overheard everything; but let us at once understand each other"—and then bending her superb dark eyes significantly upon the Duke's countenance, she added, "Your Grace can recompense me for keeping your secret."

"Yes, yes!" he eagerly exclaimed; "anything—everything!—there is nothing you can ask which I will not grant!"

"Good, my lord," she observed; "I knew that we should understand each other. And now unlock that door: for one of your domestics knows that I am here—and he may happen to enter—or rather seek to enter—when it would appear strange to find that the door was secured."

The lady sat herself calmly down; the Duke hastened to unlock the door; and then returning towards her, he also took a seat, anxiously awaiting whatever explanation she might have to give. Though still tortured with agonizing feelings, he nevertheless had now leisure to contemplate her more attentively than he had hitherto done. She was apparently about thirty years of age—of tall stature, and splendidly formed. Her countenance was handsome; her hair dark—her eyes, of corresponding hue, large and lustrous. Sensuousness

and decision were depicted in the expression of her features, and in the boldness—indeed we might say hardness of the looks which she bent upon the Duke. She was beautifully apparelled in ball costume; and therefore was evidently one of the guests who had been invited to the entertainment—or had at least found their way thither.

"My explanations will not be very long, my lord," she began; "and I repeat my assurance that your Grace has nothing to apprehend. Indeed, that we may all the better understand each other, I will be very candid with you. My life has not always proved the most virtuous that can be conceived. I was once the mistress of an officer in the Guards—subsequently of rich old Baronet, who very recently died at his country-seat near Ramsgate. I am married; my husband is old enough to be my father—almost my grandfather; and we are poor."

"You are poor?" ejaculated the Duke, clutching eagerly at the avowal. "I will make you rich! I will make you rich! But proceed."

"Certain schemes in which I was embarked," continued the lady, "and which I had hoped would all turn out to my advantage, failed most signally. I came to London to stay with some friends: your Grace knows them—I allude to Sir James and Lady Walmer. I formed their acquaintance at Brighton; and they know nothing of the worst part of my antecedents. They received an invitation from the Duchess to her Grace's ball this evening; and they brought me with them. We arrived late, having been engaged to dine elsewhere. We entered her Grace's saloons just as your lordship was retiring. In your lordship's absence, Captain Walmer, the Baronet's son, offered to introduce to me a partner for a dance. To whom should he thus present me, but that very officer of the Guards whose mistress I was a few years back?"

"Who is he?" inquired the Duke quickly.

"Colonel Tressilian," responded the lady.

"And you yourself, madam—your name? you have not yet mentioned it."

"Mrs. Oxenden," she rejoined. "On being thus presented to Colonel Tressilian I lost not my presence of mind: for I relied upon his honour not to expose me. He bowed as if to a stranger; and

I thought that I was safe. He offered me his arm; but instead of leading me to join the dance, he conducted me into an adjoining room, where we found ourselves alone. Then he threw off the mask of a temporary dissimulation, and addressed me with a stern hauteur. It appears that he is acquainted with Sir Edgar Beverley, who has married my sister. Sir Edgar is in London with his bride; and accidentally meeting Colonel Tressilian yesterday, he communicated enough to damage me irreparably in the Colonel's estimation. Therefore Tressilian insisted that I should at once leave the Duchess of Marchmont's ball-room or else he should deem it his duty to expose my character to her Grace. It was ungenerous, considering the terms on which I had formerly lived with Tressilian; but he was inexorable. I besought him to spare me in respect to the Walmer's; but with them also is he intimate—and all that I could obtain from him was a promise of forbearance and silence if in the course of to-morrow I quitted their abode. I withdrew from the ball-room; and a domestic conducted me either,—where it was my intention to wait until the Walmer's carriage should be announced. To the domestic I pleaded indisposition—but desired that my friends might not be disturbed or annoyed by the intelligence in the midst of their own recreations. Your Grace's domestic has gone to fetch the Walmer's carriage, which was originally ordered to return at two in the morning; and it was the entrance of that footman which I apprehended when I requested your Grace just now to unlock the door."

"And your husband, Mr. Oxenden?" said the Duke of Marchmont "where is he?"

"At Brighton," responded the lady; "and I care not if I never see him again." I have explained to you the circumstances which brought me to this library. I had not been here many moments, when the door opened, and I heard a voice say, Come in! quick!—I had been pacing to and fro in an agitated manner; and on hearing persons enter, I was fearful of being questioned relative to the cause of my being here. At that moment I was close to the screen, and stepped behind it—thence gliding behind the window-draperies. I wonder that your Grace heard not the rustling of either the curtains or my dress—But enough!

You now understand how it is that I am here."

"And what can I do for you?" asked the Duke. "Money in abundance—riches—gold—gifts—"

"Patience, my lord, for a few minutes!" interrupted Mrs. Oxenden; "for I have yet some explanation to give. When I married a man old enough to be my father, it was because I really wished to lead a respectable life—but more for the sake of my younger sister than my own. Now, as I have already informed your Grace, certain projects on which I was recently bent, have utterly failed; and my sister is alienated from me. I will not return to my drivelling dotard of a husband; I care not for the farce of leading what is called a respectable life for the future. On quitting Ramsgate, my mind was speedily made up. Availing myself of a long-standing invitation on the part of the Walmers', I came to their house in London. My object in plunging amongst the pleasure of the metropolis shall be frankly confessed. Indeed, my lord," added Mrs. Oxenden, significantly, "there is no need for the existence of *any* secrets between your Grace and me."

"No, no—certainly not!" said the Duke inwardly recoiling from the intimacy which had suddenly arisen upon the basis of a hideous crime becoming revealed to the ears of this woman who was so ready to take advantage of her knowledge thereof, and who could speak with such a mingling of bold hardihood and cold worldly-minded calculation.

"Well then, my lord," continued Mrs. Oxenden, "I am tired of playing the part of a virtuous and respectable wife, doomed to poverty; and I seek to become the mistress of some great and powerful personage who can give me riches. For this object I came to London: for this object I resolved to plunge into fashionable society. Accident has favoured my purpose more readily than I had dared anticipate, even with the consciousness of a beauty which is not inconsiderable."

"Mrs. Oxenden," replied Marchmont, "it shall be as you desire. To-morrow you will leave the Walmers'. Let it be in the middle of the day. Before noon you shall receive a note from me, intimating where a suitable house is taken for your reception. But remember!—the veil of inviolable secrecy—"

"It shall remain thrown over all that reached my ears this night," replied Mrs. Oxenden. "So long as your Grace performs a generous part towards me."

At this moment the door of the library was thrown open and a footman exclaimed, "Sir James Walmer's carriage is waiting for Mrs. Oxenden!"

The Duke of Marchmont handed the lady forth with every appearance of a respectful courtesy: they exchanged rapid but significant glances—and the equipage drove away.

The Duke returned for a few minutes to the library, to tranquillize the feelings which were still agitating within him notwithstanding that serene affability of manner which he resumed while escorting the splendid but infamous Mrs. Oxenden forth to the carriage: but it was no easy task for impetuous nobleman to quench the flames of the hell that was raging with volcanic power in his breast. It appeared to him as if by means of a crime he had only escaped from the power of one woman to fall into that of another; and he had already seen enough of Mrs. Oxenden to be aware that she would be imperious and exacting—that it was with no lenient hand she would sway the sceptre of despotism over him—but that she would prove his mistress in more senses than one. Vainly did the Duke endeavour to shut out from himself the recollection of his position. He could not possibly blind his eyes to conviction that every attempt which he made to disentangle himself from the web which his crimes had woven, only tightened and drew it the more caustically around him. He shuddered and he trembled as he thought of all these things; and Oh! what would he have given to recall the past, when as Lord Olandon, he had merely to contend against pecuniary difficulties, but had not as yet steeped his hands in crime!

Exhorting himself to the utmost to regain his self-possession, and to banish all these horrible, torturing, harrowing apprehensions which were crowding in upon him, the Duke issued from the library and ascended once more to the ball-room. There he endeavoured to mingle with an appearance of gaiety amidst the throng that was really gay: but pleasure sickened him, like dainties in the presence of one whose appetite is sated and palled. The very lustre of the rooms seemed to make his brain reel.

he talked at random—he laughed without reason. His veins felt as if they were running with molten lead: he was glowing with a feverish excitement—intense, agonizing. Thus a hectic colour sat like patches of vivid paint upon the ghastliness of his countenance: but the guests were far, very far from suspecting how racked, tortured, and harrowed was the mind of their host. They merely looked at each other and smiled,—thinking that his Grace had, during his absence of an hour or so, dropped in at some still more convivial party where his libations had exceeded the bounds of prudence.

It was half-an-hour past midnight, when the Duke of Marchmont was crossing the landing to pass from the ball-room to the card room, that a note was presented to him on a silver salver by one of his footmen. He at once perceived that the address was written in a beautiful female hand, but which nevertheless appeared to have been somewhat tremulous, as if with excitement.

“From whom does it come?” asked the Duke, who, with a timidity ever attendant upon a guilty conscience, sought to glean beforehand some assurance that it was not the harbinger of a fresh calamity.

“I do not know, my lord,” was the footman’s response. “It was brought by a mild-looking man, dressed in plain cloths—but having the appearance of an upper domestic—such as a steward or butler. He only desired that the note should be given to your Grace; and he immediately departed.”

The mystery attending the delivery of the billet—or at least a mystery as it appeared to the Duke’s guilty mind—filled him with a cold terror; and proceeding to a room previously unoccupied, he opened the letter. The first glance at its signature seemed to sear his very eye-balls; a cry escaped his lips: he reeled and would have fallen but that he staggered against a chair. Then he sat down; and Oh! how ghastly was his countenance now!—how that cold mortal dread chased away fever’s hectic spots from his cheeks—and how fearfully did he groan in anguish! He passed his hand across his haggard eyes; he read the contents of the billet. It fell from his grasp; and he sank back in the chair—not in a swoon—but with a sense of appalling consternation.

And all this while the dancing was going on in the gilded saloons; and numerous lacqueys were arranging a sumptuous repast in the banquetting-room. Every window of the palatial mansion was glowing with light; and the roseate floods of luxury were streaming forth through the crimson draperies and the open portals into the Square. And isolated passers-by or houseless wanderers stopped to gaze up at that lordly dwelling—each saying within himself, “Oh, how I wish I was the Duke of Marchmont!”

But if it had been given to any one of these to penetrate with a glance through those walls—to plunge a look into one particular room of that mansion, and to behold the rich and titled owner thereof lying back in his seat overwhelmed with the consternation of horror,—or if it had been possible for some spirit voice to breathe the astounding truth in the ears of those loiterers and gazers,—the self-murmured words would have been, “Thank God! I am not the Duke of Marchmont!”

CHAPTER CXII.

THE WOUNDED AYAH.

WE return to Indora’s villa. When Sagoonah went forth disguised in the apparel of her mistress, the Queen was seated with Christian and Christina in one of the exquisitely furnished rooms on the ground-floor. The evening was sultry; and on a remark to that effect being made by Indora, Christian rose to open one of the casements. At that very instant a half stifled scream coming from the garden, reached his ears, as well as those of the Queen and his sister; and the two latter started up from their seats.

Christian sprang forth upon the lawn on which the casement opened, and down to which the window reached,—Indora and Christina closely following him. It was a beautiful starlit evening; and as Christian sped in the direction of the spot whence the cry had seemed to come, he beheld a human form lying upon the gravel walk near the fountain. Ineffable was his amazement on recognising a costume which he had seen Indora wear; and ejaculations of bewildered astonishment burst from the

lips of her Majesty and Christina themselves as they the next moment arrived upon the spot. Christian drew aside the veil from the prostrate figure; and the countenance of Sagoonah was revealed!

To raise her up was the work of a moment; and now the appearance of oozing blood drew forth fresh cries of horror and alarm from the lips of those present. The faithful steward Mark and the other domestics of the Queen's household were quickly on the spot. Mark was at once despatched for a surgeon; and Sagoonah was borne into the house. She was insensible; but life was not extinct. There was a deep wound in the region of the right bosom; and the blood was gushing out copiously. She was conveyed to a bed-chamber; and the garments were quickly stripped off by the female domestics,—Indora and Christina being likewise present; but Christian for delicacy's sake had forbore to follow into that chamber until Sagoonah was placed in the couch. The surgeon arrived, and then Christian entered with him.

The wound inflicted upon the ayah was deep and serious; but it was not mortal. The medical man could not however, at this early stage of his ministrations, hold out the positive certainty that she would recover. Everything in the meantime was done that his skill suggested; and then he had leisure to inquire how the murderous attempt had been made. But on this point no one seemed able to give him any satisfactory answer: yet it appeared only too probable that the assassin blow was intended for the Queen herself, inasmuch as the hapless Sagoonah had been disguised in her raiment.

But here was fresh food for speculation and conjecture; and something had been discovered which was not mentioned to the surgeon,—inasmuch as it pleased Indora to issue a request to Christian and Christina, and a command to her domestics, that silence on that head should be observed: for if Sagoonah should recover, she might be enabled to give some satisfactory explanation—whereas if on the other hand she should perish, the Queen with her wonted generosity was anxious to spare her from the stigma which exposure would affix upon her name. The incident to which we allude was the fact that a quantity of gold and a number of Indora's most valuable jewels were found upon

Sagoonah's person, concealed beneath the garments in which she had disguised herself.

The surgeon took his departure, to prepare some medicines which were to be administered to the wounded woman; but he promised to return in the course of an hour or two. Now the Queen, Christian, and Christina,—the first sense of excited horror being over,—had leisure to discourse on the terrible incident that had occurred.

"It was your own life, dear lady," said Christina, taking the Queen's hand and pressing it to her lips, "which was aimed at! Providence has shielded you—though it is fearful to contemplate that a blow has nevertheless been dealt at another. Oh, what a horrible mystery!"

"I am utterly at a loss to conceive what could have been Sagoonah's object," said the Queen, "in apprelling herself in my costume and taking some of my richest gems with her. Could the wretched young woman have meditated robbery and flight?"

"It appears impossible," observed Christian, "to put any other construction upon the circumstances, however much we may be disposed to suspend an opinion in the absence of positive knowledge or of more criminatory evidence."

"I have always thought," said Christina, "that Sagoonah was a strange creature—"

"But I always deemed her faithful and most devotedly attached to me!" said the Queen. "I would have staked my existence on Sagoonah's fidelity; I should have deemed her utterly incapable of a dishonest action!"

"It is strange—most strange!" said Christina in a raising tone; and her looks indicated that something peculiar was passing in her mind.

"What is in your thoughts, my dear girl?" asked the Queen earnestly.

Christina conceived that would be improper to conceal any longer those nocturnal proceedings of Sagoonah which some weeks back had come to her knowledge, and relative to which she had chidden and remonstrated with her. She accordingly explained how she had one night detected Sagoonah poring over a huge file of the *Times*, in contravention of the Queen's injunction; and how on another night she had followed Sagoonah into the Chamber where her Majesty was sleeping. Indora listened with

mingled alarm and astonishment; and then she became profoundly pensive for several minutes. In reply to questions which her Majesty presently put, Christina detailed the explanations which Sagoonah had given on the two occasions respectively.

"In reference to reading the *Times*," said our young heroine, "Sagoonah pleaded a desire to prosecute her English studies;—and I believed her. In respect to her visit to your ladyship's chamber, she advanced a tissue of superstitious beliefs, the grossness of which I endeavoured to point out. She declared her love for you, and spoke of the dread which she had lest evil spirits should do your ladyship a mischief. Considering that her offence arose from ignorance and not from absolute willfulness, and that she could not possibly entertain any sinister design, I promised to keep silent upon the subject. Perhaps, dear lady, I should have told you——"

"No, Christina," observed the Queen: "you were generous and kind-hearted—it is impossible to blame you! There is some dark mystery attached to the proceedings of Sagoonah: but it would be wrong to judge her hastily in a hostile sense. Sometimes the good intentions of individual wear at the first glance a suspicious aspect, especially when they are executed in secrecy and when it is sought to shroud them in obscurity."

But having thus spoken, Queen Indora again relapsed into a profound pensiveness; and silence prevailed for many minutes in the apartment."

"Do you not remember, lady," asked Christina, at length breaking this silence in a gentle voice, "that Mr. Redcliffe sent you a warning note, of which you spoke to me——"

"Yes, yes, my dear friend!" ejaculated Indora: "I have been thinking of it!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Christian, springing up from his seat; and this reminds me of a duty as yet unfulfilled. In the bewilderment occasioned by this horrible occurrence, I had forgotten that we should give an immediate intimation to the police——"

"It is already done, Christian," interrupted Queen Indora. "Did you not hear me speaking to the surgeon on the subject, and intimating my desire that no greater publicity should be given to the occurrence than is absolutely necessary?"

"But the officers of justice will come," exclaimed Christian, "Would it not be well for me to go and fetch Mr. Redcliffe, that he may advise us also?"

At this moment there was a knock at the front door; and mark entered to say that an inspector of police, with a constable, requested an interview with her ladyship. The Queen ordered them to be admitted;—and we may here remind the reader that the real rank of Indora was generally unknown, and that she passed as an Indian lady of great wealth. But the twins, as well as the faithful Mark himself, knew that she was a Queen—although, at her own request, they continued to address her by much more humble titles.

The inspector and the constable entered the apartment in which Indora was seated with our hero and heroine; and the superior officer said, "We have heard from Mr. Clarkson"—thus alluding to the surgeon—"that an attempt at assassination has been made in your ladyship's grounds but that there are reasons why the affair should obtain as little publicity as possible. Nevertheless, my lady, it is our duty to investigate the matter; for which object we require whatever information you may have to give."

The Queen recited the simple facts of how her ayah had been discovered in the garden in a state of insensibility, and with a deep wound between the bosom and the shoulder. Christian added that after the removal of the wounded woman into the house, he had searched carefully about the spot but had failed to discover the weapon with which the blow was dealt. The officers went forth to examine the place for themselves,—Christian accompanying them, and Mark attending with a bright lamp—which was however scarcely necessary, for the moon was pouring its full tide of effulgence upon the scene. The officers discerned the traces of large, coarse shoes upon the border and on the grass; and they were enabled to establish the fact that the intending assassin must have concealed himself in the midst of the clump of evergreens. They traced his footsteps to the palings which he had leapt on quitting the grounds; they followed them through the fields, until they ceased in the neighbourhood of a road leading out into the country. Then the officers returned to the villa.

"I presume," said the Inspector to Queen Indora, "that your lordship has no idea whether any one could have conceived a revengeful feeling towards your Hindoo servant or yourself——"

"Rest assured," interrupted the Queen, "that if I could point out the man, justice should not be cheated of its due! But candidly speaking, there are circumstances within my knowledge which may possibly unravel themselves, and lead to a development of this mystery. Understand me well! Though these circumstances to which I allude, are known to me, yet they do not point out who the assassin himself may be. More I cannot say,—unless it be to add that the greater the publicity given to this occurrence, the less will be the chance of those circumstances developing themselves from mysterious obscurity into an intelligible light."

If the woman should die, my lady," said the inspector,—“or if accident should enable us to arrest any one on suspicion of having perpetrated this deed,—it will be necessary for your ladyship to reveal at a Coroner's Inquest, in case of the death—or before a magistrate, in case of the arrest of a suspected person—all those circumstances, to which your ladyship had just alluded.”

“Living in this country under the protection of its laws,” responded Indora, “I shall assuredly conform to them.”

“At the same time,” continued the inspector, “after all your ladyship has said, we will keep the whole matter as quiet as possible; because, so far from doing anything to defeat justice, we, as its functionaries, are bound to uncover and advance its proceedings. Does your ladyship——”

“It were well if you questioned me no farther,” interrupted the Queen. “I have told you as much as under circumstances I can possibly impart.”

“Yet there is the fact,” said the inspector, “that your servant was clad in apparel belonging to your ladyship:”—for Mr. Clarkson had told the police-authorities this much, though the affair of the ayah's self-appropriation of the gold and jewels remained unknown alike to surgeon and constables.

“Most solemnly do I assure you,” said the Queen, “that I am utterly at a loss to comprehend my ayah's motive in thus appareling herself in my clothes. But whatever a mere freak, or whether for

some less venial purpose—she has been sufficiently punished.”

“And your ladyship does not mean to charge her with anything?” asked the officer.

“Charge her?” ejaculated Indora, almost indignantly: “no I certainly not!”

“Her ladyship would rather that this interview should end,” whispered Christian haughtily to the inspector; and at the same time he slipped a couple of sovereigns into the officer's hand.

“Very good, very good!” observed the inspector, pocketing the amount. “We would not for the world give her ladyship any unnecessary trouble or annoyance not for the world, sir! We shall let the matter rest until we receive any fresh instructions from her ladyship.”

The inspector and the constable then took their departure; and the moment they were gone, the Queen said to Christian, “Now, my young friend, you shall proceed to Mr. Redcliffe, and tell him what has occurred. The carriage will be ready for you in a few minutes.”

Our hero accordingly set off. It was now past ten o'clock at night; and he found Mr. Redcliffe at the lodgings in Mortimer Street. That gentleman was horrified at the intelligence conveyed to him; and he lost not a moment in accompanying Christian in the carriage to the villa. During the drive thither Mr. Redcliffe learnt from our hero's lips everything that had taken place; and he was particular in eliciting from Christian all that had been said by the police-officers or in their presence. He then fell in to a profound reverie; and the silence was not broken until the villa was reached.

In the meanwhile the surgeon had returned. Sagoorah was unconscious of all that was passing around her; but still there was no immediate fear for her life. Christian, overcome and exhausted by the excitement of feeling which she had sustained, had sought her couch at the earnest entreaty of the Queen; while Indora herself had been sitting by the bed-side of Sagoorah, who knew not that the mistress whom she had intended to wrong so deeply by wreaking her vengeance upon Clement Redcliffe, was thus kindly ministering to her there.

Mr. Redcliffe and Queen Indora consulted together alone for a considerable time. It was impossible for them to doubt as to the source whence a horrible vindictiveness had emanated; antecedent

circumstances only too plainly showed that the Duke of Marchmont must be the navigator of the assassin-deed. But then, who was the assassin—or rather, we should say, the intending murderer? From all that Mr. Redcliffe had previously communicated to the Queen, she had felt convinced that it was not Mr. Wilson Stanhope; and hence had she so emphatically expressed to the police-officers her incompetency to point any particular individual. Mr. Redcliffe now shared her Majesty's opinion that the perpetrator of the deed was not Stanhope: for he had heard and seen enough in the conservatory of Oaklands to be enabled to judge—aided by the teaching of his experience in the mysteries of the human heart—that Stanhope, though unprincipled and profligate, was not the man to go to such a tremendous extreme. It was therefore evident that the Duke of Marchmont had found some other instrument to execute—or attempt the execution of his foul purpose against Queen Indora's life: but still there were circumstances which prevented Mr. Redcliffe from denouncing the Duke before all the world; and the same considerations had led Indora to abstain from mentioning his Grace's name to the police-constables.

"Indora," said Mr. Redcliffe, taking her hand and pressing it with a grateful warmth, "this frightful danger did you draw down upon your own head by your magnanimous intervention in those affairs wherein I am deeply interested! But Providence has willed that you should escape the peril—and the blow has smitten another. I need scarcely remind you that the moment has not yet come when we can deal openly with him whose name it sickens and appals me to mention: but yet something must be done to paralyse him—to smite his soul with a new terror—and thus prevent him from daring to think of the renewal of his assassin purpose."

"Yes, my dear Clement," responded the Queen, "the tangled skein must go on gradually unravelling itself—gradually but surely, as for some time past it has been doing. And then——"

"But in the meantime, I repeat," interrupted Redcliffe, "something must be done. Ah! first of all, for a moment, let us talk of Sagoonah. You have just told me of her singular behaviour, as explained to you by Miss Ashton—how she pondered over the newspaper files by

night—and how she sought your own chamber. These things are suspicious enough: but no—think that to a certain extent I have the power of reading them. Were it not for the dreadful circumstances of this evening, I should have abstained from revealing to you something that occurred—and it is this."

Mr. Redcliffe then proceeded to explain all that took place between himself and Sagoonah—how she had declared her love—and how for a moment she had menaced him. He stated likewise that he had no previous occasions been struck by the peculiar flashings of her eyes—and how those looks had ever haunted him, as if fraught with a sinister and unknown terror, and as if being ominous of evil. Indora listened with profoundest astonishment—an astonishment so great that it for a while absorbed all other feelings: but she was too noble hearted and of too lofty a disposition to experience the anger of mere jealousy, or any vexation arising from a presumptuous rivalry on the part of her ayah.

"And now what think you?" she inquired: "what do you deduce from all that you have been telling me?"

"That Sagoonah has fathomed my secret," responded Mr. Redcliffe; "and that she pored over the files of the *Times* in order to obtain a complete insight into the past. That woman was resolved to hold me in her power. I understand her disposition well. If she could not have my love, she would give me her hatred: if she could not bend me to her purpose, she would wreak upon me her vengeance."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Queen, with anguish depicted upon her countenance: "and it was all my fault, dear Clement, that the wretched Sagoonah has been enabled to penetrate the mysteries which surrounded you—those mysteries which I had so fondly hoped were unvoiled only to myself! It was through me—alas! through me that those newspapers were thus thrown in her way. Oh! have been indiscreet: but I could not possibly foresee——"

"Blame not yourself, Indora—blame not yourself," said Mr. Redcliffe, again pressing the Queen's hand fervently. "All that you did was for the very best of purposes; and it would seem as if Providence were upon our side: for rest assured that Sagoonah was bent upon some design of mischief against myself—or it may be against you, at the moment

when the assassin's dagger struck her down. It is only too evident that she was quitting your service for ever. She had laden herself with your gold and your jewels that she might have wealth in her possession: she had dressed herself in your apparel, either that she might throw off the character together with the garb of a menial—or else that she might personate you in some manner that should bring dishonour upon your name. Yes—these are the only alternatives which the circumstances present to our view: and the wretched woman has received a signal chastisement on the very threshold of her iniquitous purpose."

"Oh, that she could have been so wicked!" exclaimed the Queen: "and that I should have placed such confidence in her! I loved Sagoonah—yes, I loved her: or else never, never should I have unbosomed my secrets unto her!"

"She is now stretched up on a couch," observed Mr. Redcliffe solemnly, "from which she may perhaps never rise again: or on the other hand, if she should recover, it will only be after a long and lingering illness;—and thus for the present she is robbed of her sting in respect to both you and me. More than once have I seen that Providence is really working in my behalf; and if Sagoonah should die, it will be by heaven's dispensation which chooses to remove a reptile from our path: whereas if she should recover, it is to be hoped that during the interval that she must remain powerless for renewed mischief, the tangled skein will have completely unravelled itself, and I shall have no longer any reason to dread her knowledge of my secret. But now, my dear Indora, let us speak in respect to yourself:—for measures must be taken to insure your safety."

"Let nothing be done, Clement," responded the Queen, "which may in any sense militate against your own interests or tend to compromise yourself. You know—you know," she added, with a look of ineffable tenderness—but one that was full of a soft pure delicacy of holiest and chastest love as well as of the heart's illimitable devotion,—“you know that I would cheerfully lay down my life for your sake!”

"I know it, Indora—I know it," answered Mr. Redcliffe, profoundly touched by this fresh proof of the Queen's attachment. "But think not for an instant I am so selfish as to suffer

your safety to be any further compromised on my account. No, no—it must not be! Something shall be done—and that quickly too. Ah, a thought strikes me! Take writing materials, Indora—sit down and pen a few lines to my dictation."

Her Majesty at once complied with Mr. Redcliffe's desire; and as she sat at the table in the drawing-room where this discourse took place,—Mr. Redcliffe slowly pacing to and fro, and with various feelings successively depicting themselves upon his countenance, dictated the following lines:—

"The assassin-blow which was intended for myself has smitten another. You will start at these words: horror will seize upon you: your wretched conscience will tell you that heaven itself is abiding me and warning against you. And you will feel, too, how much it is for you to contemplate fresh iniquities in the hope of protecting yourself from the consequences of past ones. The web which you yourself have woven, in closing in around you, I do not bid such an one as you to confess everything and thereby make as much atonement as you can for the past; because I know that you will cling with a frenzied and desperate tenacity until the very last to that position which you hold. But I warn you, my lord, against a renewed attempt at a crime for which I am prepared. At the very indication of such a proceeding on your part, will I remorselessly reveal whatever I know and the hand which grasped that portentous dagger within the walls of Oaklands on an occasion to which I need not more particularly refer—that same hand, I repeat, shall pen a narrative of all which concern yourself, and to the Queen of England shall this narrative be sent. Tremble therefore at the precipice on whose verge you stand; and remember that if you again dare me to precipitate you into the abyss, nothing shall deter me from thus hastening a consummation which the progress of circumstances will otherwise sooner or later work out.

"INDORA."

The hand of the Queen trembled as it guided the pen which traced these lines; and as we have already said, varied were the feelings which successively found expression on the features of Mr. Redcliffe. It was in a low deep solemn tone that he dictated the note; and twice or thrice he pressed his hand as if in anguish to his brow. It was evident that a train of horrible memories—a troop of portentous antecedents, were conjured up by the words of that letter to the mental vision alike of Clement Redcliffe and of Queen Indora. The billet was finished: it was directed and sealed; and the Queen said, "Are you determined, Clement, to despatch this message?"

"Yes, Indora—I am resolved," was the answer: "it is absolutely necessary. We will send it by the faithful Mark; and he shall be instructed to deliver it in Bolgrave Square this very night,—without saying from whom it comes, and without tarrying for any reply."

This was accordingly done; and soon afterwards Mr. Redcliffe took his departure with Christian Ashton.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WOMAN'S LOVE.

THE reader has seen the effect which Indora's letter produced upon the wretched Marchmont. If the writing of it had conjured up troops of hideous memories to sweep through the brains of the Queen and of Mr. Redcliffe, the reading of the document had assuredly done no less in reference to the Duke. For nearly half an-hour did he remain like one stupefied with horror and appalled with dismay, in the apartment to which he had retired: it appeared to him as if he were in the midst of a frightful walking dream. Suddenly he started up from his chair, and dashed his hand with frantic violence against his forehead, as if he sought to beat in his own skull, or crush his own tortured, harrowed brain. Oh, the misery, the anguish, the crucifixion of feeling which this wretched man endured at that moment! Take all the horrors which have characterized the most frightful scenes ever enacted on the theatre of the world—the horrors of condemned cells, death-beds, or battle-fields—sum them all up—aggregate, compound them—extract their most refined essence—and it were nothing, nothing in comparison with the hideous tortures experienced by the Duke of Marchmont now. Oh! the deadly strife at Arbela, at Pharsalia, at Waterloo, or at Inkerman—even these were all nothing in comparison with the stupendous concurrence of horrors which now found a focus in the soul of the Duke of Marchmont!

But the must endeavour to reflect upon his position: he must deliberate with himself. Reflection and deliberation!—were these possible with one in his agonized state of mind? We have said that he started up from his seat: he struck his hand with violence against

his brow. He paced to and fro: he felt that he was staggering and reeling like a drunken man: he sank down into his seat again, groaning heavily—and, Oh! how mournfully, how lugubriously, how despairingly! His eye fell upon the note, which had dropped from his hand and lay upon the carpet. He snatched up, and read it again. Yes—it was all as his horrified memory retained its content. Again starting up from his seat, he applied the note to a wax-taper; and when the flame seized it, he threw it into the grate. It then for a moment appeared as if he breathed more freely; and he said to himself, "Let me think on all these things."

In order to concentrate his ideas, he rested his elbows upon a table: and covering his countenance with his hands, pressed the fingers upon his eyelids to keep them closed—so that by shutting out external objects, he might be the better able to turn all his attention inwards. He felt that he was in the position of a general besieged in a town towards which the enemy were gradually advancing: the trenches were being pushed nearer—and nearer mines were being formed—batteries were being raised—and he could not anticipate when the final attack should be made. Nor could he altogether understand with what weapons the enemy were fighting; and therefore he was at a loss to devise the means for strengthening his own position. The longer he reflected, the more bewildering grew his reflections: the longer he deliberated, the more perplexing became his deliberation.

"Indora knows much—and if not everything, at least *too much*!" he thought within himself. "But if so, why does she linger and tarry ere striking the final blow? Or is it that she only suspects, and is now engaged in accumulating proofs? Who is she? and what are my affairs to her? Can it be possible that *he* really lives? Yes, yes! Fool that I am to endeavour to blind myself to the tremendous truth! Have I not seen him? But does he know Indora? is there aught in connexion between them? Ah! if so, he may be found at her house—he may visit her: she may be his wife—or his paramour? Who knows? What if I were to strike a tremendous blow and hand him over to the grasp of justice? No, no! caution must be used! That blow might redound upon myself. And who is it that has been stricken by the bravo's

dagger instead of Indera? How could the mistake have occurred? Oh, all this is dreadfully bewildering! My soul is on fire—my heart burns, it is not blood which flows in my veins—it is molten lead. My very brain is soothing in boiling oil. The pans of hell are upon me now! Oh, my God! there *must* be a hell hereafter; for there is even one in this life!"

And the wretched Duke of Marchmont, removing his hands from his countenance, and opening his eyes, glanced around him with ghastly shuddering looks of horror, as if he dreaded to behold Satan himself standing near, clothed in all the infernal majesty of those terrors which belong to his awful sovereignty.

"And then this woman too!" ejaculated the Duke, thus suddenly and abruptly resuming his silent reflection: "this woman who has discovered my secret!"—and he alluded to Mrs. Oxenden: "can I succeed in bringing her to silence? Yes, yes, this at least is practicable! But, Oh! what perils environ me! A spark may cause the explosion of a mine beneath my feet: a breath may destroy me! That villain!"—now alluding to the Barker: "if by accident he should be captured, he might tell everything. And if proof were demanded, how could I now indignantly repel the charge of such a miscreant, when he would demand that Mrs. Oxenden should be found and brought forward to corroborate his statement?"

At this instant the door of the room opened, and the Duchess of Marchmont made her appearance. The beautiful and amiable Lavinia came alone; she entered timidly and hesitatingly, with anxiety depicted upon her countenance; and she stopped short on perceiving how ghastly and how haggard were the looks of her husband, notwithstanding the sudden attempt which he made to assume an air of mental composure.

"My dear Hugh!" she said, again advancing towards him, "I fear that something dreadful has occurred to distress you?"

"Something dreadful?" he ejaculated, half fiercely, half affrightedly: "what mean you?"

"Oh! do not be angry with me, my dear husband," said the Duchess laying her fair white hand upon his arm, and looking up entreatingly into his

countenance. "Believe me, I am not indifferent to your welfare——"

"Oh, indifferent indeed!" cried the Duke, affecting to laugh scornfully. "Perhaps you have come to tell me that you have forgiven me for my past conduct—as you have already told me on more than one occasion: and you think that I shall go down upon my knees to thank you?"

"No, my lord," replied the Duchess, the tears gushing from her eyes; "I neither think nor expect anything of the kind. I seek no self-justification on your part. But I cannot forget that I am your wife: I cannot forget that the vows which I took at the altar, pledge me to certain duties which must be fulfilled——"

"Enough of this maudlin nonsense, madam!" interrupted the Duke. "I understand you well. In thus speaking on your own duties, you insidiously and cunningly seek to remind me of mine."

"No—you wrong me again; you wrong me, my dear Hugh!" said the amiable Duchess, the tears flowing faster from her eyes. "Will you put me to the test? you tell me wherefore you are afflicted? and you will not how profoundly I can sympathize with you. Oh, for one kind word from your lip!"

"And why do you think that I am afflicted?" demanded the Duke quickly. "In short, what do you mean?"

"There is something in your manner—and—pardon me if I add that there is something also in your looks which prove but too unmistakably that you are afflicted. Oh! I declare solemnly, Hugh," continued the Duchess, "that your interests are dear to me—very dear to me!—and I have seen this evening how you have laughed with a hollow laugh—how you have spoken incoherently: and then too—but pardon me for what I am going to say—I happened to overhear one of the domestics say to another that you had received a letter a mere glance at which had seemed to strike as if with a sense of some misfortune."

"Ah! you overheard that?" ejaculated the Duke, who could scarcely prevent himself from stamping his foot and crying out with rage. "Then you watch me—and you listen to conversations——"

"Oh! I entreat your forbearance, my lord," said the Duchess imploringly: "not for worlds would I give you offence! I have often and often seen that a singular and painful expression has

gitted over your countenance: and I have been afraid——yes, I have been afraid,” continued Lavinia meekly, “that it was on account of myself. But to-night your looks and manner have been so peculiar——and then too, the circumstance of that letter——in a word, my dear Hugh, I was resolved to take a bold step and speak to you in a way which I have not before ventured upon. Will you forgive me? will you attribute my proceeding to its true motive? And listen to me, dear Hugh,” continued Lavinia, with her tearful countenance upturned towards the Duke; “if there be anything I can do to contribute to your happiness—or if my presence be hateful to you, tell me so, and I will leave you——”

“Ah! you would abandon me?” ejaculated the Duke, scarcely knowing at the moment what he was saying—but probably speaking from the impulse of one who felt that he was not in a position to part with a single friend who was in any way interested in his welfare: “you would abandon me?—and perhaps you would league yourself with my enemies?”

“Heaven forbid!” exclaimed Lavinia vehemently; “never, never! But, Oh! your words are a revelation! You have enemies? Tell me who they are: tell me how their enmity is developing itself. Oh! now, my dear Hugh, you can put my affection to the test—and you will see that I have really known how to forgive and forget all the past!”

“Ah! this constant recurrence to the past!” ejaculated the Duke impatiently.

“I meant it not as a reproach—much less as an offence,” said Lavinia deprecatingly and earnestly. “I only wish you to understand that I am the same towards you in respect to my duty as I ever was: and it requires but one kind word from your lips to make me the same towards you in respect to love.”

There are times when the hearts of even the vilest and most worthless of men are susceptible of the influence of woman's love and when the softness of that feminine devotion has an ineffable soothing balm for the wounded spirit, even though that spirit be tortured by the suicidal infliction of its own crimes. Such was the state of the Duke of Murchmont now; and a strong revulsion of feeling took place within him. For a long period he had hated his wife—he had treated her with cold neglect, as

well as with flagrant indignity: but now all of a sudden his heart seemed to warm towards her—he looked upon her countenance—he saw that it was tearful—and he knew that those tears were flowing for himself.

“Yes, Lavinia,” he said, “I am unhappy—and I have enemies! I do not deserve this kindness at your hands—I feel that I do not!”

Oh, my dearest husband I murmured the Duchess, taking his hand and pressing it to her lips: “you have spoken to me in a tone and in a manner which in one sense has given me happiness, but which in another has filled me with affliction. You seem to promise me a restoration of your love and confidence: and it is this that makes me happy. On the other hand, you tell me that you yourself are unhappy and that you have enemies; and it is this which smites me with sadness. Who are these enemies of yours? If you have given that a right to persecute you, may they not be moved by the intercessions of a woman?—and if without reason they are persecuting you, may they not be turned into right path by the remonstrances of your wife, on whose head would redound any evil which happened to yourself?”

“Lavinia,” answered the Duke, as an idea struck him, “it is possible that you can serve me——yes, yes—you can if you will!”

“And I will!” exclaimed the Duchess vehemently: “you know that I will!” she added with impassioned energy. “Oh! it would indeed delight me to be of service to you—to dispel the cloud from your brow—to give back peace to your look! Tell me how all this may be done. And ah! now I bethink me, if the revolutions you may have to make be of a character to unveil some weakness on your part, think not for an instant that I shall retreat from my pledge, or that I shall with the less energy undertake whatsoever mission you may confide to me!”

“You are sure of this, Lavinia?” said the Duke impressively, and gazing upon her with earnestness. “Come now—pause and reflect. I know the purity of your nature—I know the delicacy of your mind; and if anything should transpire at all calculated to shock you——”

“Set at rest these apprehensions,” said the Duchess: “I beseech you to banish them from your mind. Oh! so

far from shrinking at the task which I am undertaking, I accept it with cheerfulness: for I may perhaps hope that it will revive somewhat of your love towards me."

"Lavinia," rejoined the Duke in a low deep voice, while he gazed fixedly upon his wife, "I shall experience the deepest gratitude, towards you; and gratitude you know, is a sentiment which under certain circumstances expands into love. On the other hand, I fear lost the love you experience for me——"

"Will be impaired?" ejaculated the Duchess. "No, no—impossible! Give me an opportunity of proving my love—and I shall love you all the more for having done this. I do not deceive you as to my motives——I am seeking the return of your confidence and of your love. This I would purchase at almost any price; and therefore think not that the past in respect to yourself will shock me. I shall look upon it as something to be forgotten!"

"I thank you beforehand, Lavinia—yes! beforehand accept my gratitude!" exclaimed the Duke, "But no more tonight! To-morrow I will tell you what it is that I require at your hands. Return to your guests at once——and again, Lavinia, accept my gratitude!"

The Duke took her hand and raised it to his lips. It was not altogether an act of dissimulation, nor for the purpose of cajoling one whom he sought to render servicable in the terrible difficulties of his position; but it was that in the midst of these difficulties he found one who was prepared to befriend him and who would devote herself to his cause. Lavinia, by her amiable conduct, was making a wife's love necessary as it were to a man who had hitherto proved a vile husband; she was exercising that soft feminine influence to which we have before alluded, and at the very moment when it was so much needed to soothe and strengthen the tortured spirit of him who was thus brought to acknowledge it. He took her hand, we say; but she bursting into tears, throw herself into his arms, weeping and sobbing convulsively. There was happiness and there was sorrow in her soul; there was joy and there was grief,—joy at being thus enabled to play the part of the ministering angel—but grief at the thought that her husband should have woes and cares requiring such ministration. Yes—she sank upon his

bosom; and as the Duke contemplated that beautifully handsome woman—not only in her thirty-third year—whose tall figure was so finely formed—and the masses of whose light auburn hair floated upon shoulders and a neck of dazzling whiteness,—when he saw the large blue eyes upturned towards him, looking so beautiful in their tenderness, in even through their tears,—when, in a word his glance swept over the entire assemblage of charms which graced his wife the Duke of Marchmont felt that the soul was touched, and a pang of remorse smote him on account of all his past conduct towards her. His arms encircled her waist—he strained her to his heart and in a broken voice he murmured "Would to heaven, Lavinia, that I had ever remained worthy of such a love as this!"

The Duchess besought her husband not to allude painfully to the past; and wiping away her tears, she smiled sweetly upon him,—observing, "You are about to put my devotion to the test: fear not that it will recoil from aught which may transpire while working in your cause. You know not, my dear husband, how far a woman's devotion may extend!"

"To-morrow, Lavinia—to-morrow," rejoined the Duke, "I will tell you what you are to do for me, and how you may serve my cause."

The Duchess again smiled sweetly upon her husband, and then quitted the room.

"You—she can serve me," said the Duke to himself as soon as he was again alone. "She is loving, and she is faithful; and whatever may come to her knowledge she at least will not betray me. No, no—she will assist me until the very last!"

But as the reader may have understood, the amiable Lavinia little suspected how deeply her husband had immersed himself in the flood of iniquity: she could conceive no greater amount of guilt than that of which he had been culpable towards herself, as recorded in some of the earlier chapters of this narrative. She had vowed that she would not suffer herself to be deterred by aught which might come to her knowledge while acting on his behalf; and the affectionate lady revelled in dreams of comfort and happiness, peace and love, to be enjoyed with him

towards whom she was exhibiting so much magnanimous devotion.

The newspapers of the following morning contained a paragraph relative to the occurrence at Indora's villa; and it may be as well for us to make the reader aware of the extent to which the particulars thereof had transpired. The paragraph ran in the ensuing manner:—

"MYSTERIOUS ATTEMPT AT ASSASSINATION.—A beautiful and somewhat secluded villa, situated in the neighbourhood of Bayswater and Notting Hill, was last evening the scene of a crime which is enveloped in considerable mystery. The villa thus alluded to, is inhabited by an Eastern lady of rank and fortune, who, it is believed, was impelled by curiosity to visit our shores. Amongst the domestics in the service of the Lady Indora, is a beautiful Hindoo woman, named Sagoonah. Last evening Sagoonah, while walking in the garden attached to the villa, was assailed by some unknown murderer who inflicted upon her a severe wound with a knife or other sharp instrument. The cry which the unfortunate woman uttered reached the ears of the Lady Indora; and her ladyship, accompanied by some guests whom she was entertaining at the time, rushed forth into the garden. The unfortunate Sagoonah was discovered senseless on the ground, wounded in the manner already described; and she was at once conveyed into the house. Surgical assistance was immediately procured; and we are happy in being enabled to state that there is no reason to despair of Sagoonah's eventual recovery. The police were quickly informed of the circumstances, and on examining the premises, they traced the footsteps of the assassin for some distance, until the marks altogether disappeared. The Lady Indora is quite unable to account for the murderous attack made upon her dependant; and thus for the present the deed enveloped in the darkest mystery."

Such was the paragraph inserted in the morning journals; and the Duke of Marchmont was thereby made aware of the fact that it was the ayah Sagoonah who had been stricken by the Burker's weapon. He could only account for it by the conjecture that the Burker must have made some extra-ordinary mistake; but his mind was relieved of a considerable load, inasmuch as it was evident that Indora was maintaining a profound silence in respect to her knowledge that he himself was the instigator of a crime of which it was intended that she should be the victim.

On the morning of which we are speaking, the Duke was breakfasting with his wife; and while reading the newspapers, he gave vent to an ejaculation which startled her Grace.

"This is extraordinary!" he exclaimed; and directing Lavinia's attention to the paragraph, he bade her peruse it.

"It is dreadful!" observed the Duchess when she had read the brief narrative. "But why did it elicit that ejaculation from your lips?"

"Because, my dear Lavinia," the Duke answered addressing her in those affectionable terms to which she had long been so completely unaccustomed, "it is to this very villa that you are to proceed for me—and it is this self-same Lady Indora whom you are to see."

The Duchess was astonished at these announcements; but still not for a single instant did she imagine that her husband could have any connexion with the crime recorded in the paragraph. She accordingly said, "You have only to express your wishes, Hugh, and they shall be fulfilled."

"I told you, Lavinia, last night," continued the Duke, "that I have enemies who are working against me; and the Lady Indora is one. Ah! I see that the colour mounts to your cheeks—but your suspicion is wrong: there has been no unlawful connexion between that Eastern lady and myself. Do not ask me to explain anything——"

"No. Tell me how to act," said Lavinia, "and blindfold will I obey you."

"Go to Indora's villa," proceeded the Duke of Marchmont; "ask for an interview with her ladyship—tell her who you are—say that you are the Duchess of Marchmont—and then——"

"And then?" said Lavinia, perceiving that her husband hesitated.

"And then," proceeded the Duke, "tell Indora that you have heard from my lips that she is at war with me: say that without having given you the slightest details, I have nevertheless acknowledged that she has reason to complain against me—use all the power of your intercession that there may be peace between us—hesitate not Lavinia, to humble yourself, if necessary, in the presence of that Eastern lady—when addressing her, speak as the wife of him with whom she is thus at war—nay, if needful, go down upon your knees and beg that for your own sake that hostility may cease."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Lavinia, a blighting, withering suspicion now darting in unto her mind; and while becoming deadly pale, she glanced towards the newspaper.

The Duke, averting his countenance, affected not to have caught that ejaculation from his wife's lips, nor to perceive

the agitation which had smitten her; and he said, "You have promised, you know, to obey me blindfold! You have already won my gratitude—and if you value my love, *that* likewise will become your's."

The Duchess was about to implore her husband in impassioned terms to set at rest the horrible suspicion which had just flashed in unto her mind,—when she said to herself, "No, it is impossible!—he is incapable of such a deed!—Besides, it happened to the servant—and naught can regard her which may have passed between her mistress and him!"

Then the Duchess felt glad in her own mind that she had kept back the words that she was about to utter: for she fancied that they would have been outrageously insulting to her husband. Besides, when she now again looked at him, and saw that he had a calm demeanour, she naturally supposed that he himself could not have for an instant conjectured that such a suspicion had entered her mind.

"And when I am I to go?" she asked: "when shall I pay the visit to the Lady Indora?"

"Without delay, Lavinia," responded the Duke. "Let the carriage be ordered—and proceed thither at once. Perhaps it would be as well if you were to prepare a note beforehand, containing some such words as these:—'The Duchess of Marchmont earnestly requests an interview with the Lady Indora.'—This will ensure you admission: whereas if you merely sent in your card, it might be refused. Will you do all this, Lavinia? and will you likewise promise me that whatever you may hear—whatever the Lady Indora may tell you——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the Duchess hurriedly; "I faithfully promise that whatever she may tell me, shall not deter me from my purpose of serving your cause to the best of my endeavours!"

Thus speaking, Lavinia hastened from the room, to prepare her toilet for the visit which she had to pay. Again had that withering, blighting suspicion flashed in unto her mind in spite of herself: for it struck her at the moment that she beheld something peculiar in her husband's look:—and then, too, that constant reiteration of the entreaty that she would not be shocked at anything she might hear concerning him, naturally excited the suspicion which connected the Duke in some way or another with

the paragraph in the newspaper. But Lavinia was resolved to perform her promise;—and doing her best to dispel that sickening suspicion, she took her seat in the carriage which was to bear her to Indora's villa.

We will not dwell upon the various conflicting ideas which agitated the mind of the Duchess as she was conveyed towards her destination. She shuddered as the carriage halted at the gate leading into the grounds where no foul a deed had been perpetrated on the previous night; and she inwardly murmured, "Heaven forbid that the hostility which seems to exist between this lady and my husband, can have any reference to an episode so terrible as that—or that it forms one of the causes of offence for which I am to humble myself even to to the kneeling at her feet."

The summons at the gate was answered by the faithful Mark,—who, perceiving a splendid equipage with a ducal coronet upon the panels, hastened to the carriage-window, to which a beautiful lady was beckoning him.

"Have the kindness," said Lavinia, "to give my card and this note to the Lady Indora, and I will await any message you may bring back."

Christina Ashton had gone with her brother to pay a visit to Isabella Vincent; and Indora was alone in the drawing-room, when at about the hour of noon the ducal equipage drove up to her gate. She wondered who the visitress could be; for she caught a glimpse of Lavinia as her Grace bent forward at the carriage-window to give the note and card to Mark. The reader may imagine the Queen's astonishment when her faithful major-domo entered with that card and that billet. Mark himself perceived the amazement of his mistress; but that expression of surprise quickly passed away from Indora's countenance; and she said to Mark, "You can introduce her Grace hither."

Indora knew perfectly well that Lavinia was a lady of stainless reputation, noted for her amiable and excellent qualities, and whose character afforded a striking contrast with that of her ducal husband. She had therefore granted the audience after a very brief hesitation: but during the few minutes which elapsed until the Duchess of Marchmont was introduced, Indora was engaged in a thousand conjectures as to

what the object of this visit could possibly mean.

Lavinia was introduced; and Indora rose to receive her. Mark at once retired: the Queen and the Duchess were now alone together: but the latter knew not that it was a lady of Sovereign rank in whose presence she thus found herself. The very first glances which they threw upon one another produced mutually favourable impressions. The extraordinary beauty of the Queen struck Lavinia with astonishment as well as with admiration: while the modestly-dignified demeanour, and feminine air of self-confidence—frank, open, lofty, and yet utterly exempt from boldness—which characterized her Majesty, at once proclaimed the high-minded, well principled, pure-hearted woman. On the other hand, the more soft and winning beauty of Lavinia—the pensiveness which habitually rested in her large blue eyes—and the half entreating air with which she bestowed the salutations of courtesy upon Indora, at once riveted the interest of that Eastern lady.

They sat down together; and the Duchess began by apologizing for the intrusion of such a visit on the part of a perfect stranger. She spoke in the low fluid tremulous voice which indicated a distressed and suspenseful state of mind, while her looks softly but eloquently implored the Queen's consideration and forbearance.

"Your Grace need offer no apology," replied Indora; "for by the tenour of your note, brief though its contents be, I am led to conjecture that some business of importance has procured me the honour of this visit?"

"It is indeed of great importance to myself—and—and—to another!" responded Lavinia tremulously. "But first let me ask how fares it with your servant?"—and here the voice of the Duchess quivered and faltered more and more: "for I have read that paragraph in the newspaper."

"My servant lies in a very dangerous condition. She is totally unconscious: but still the medical attendant gives hope of her eventual recovery:"—and as Indora thus spoke, she fixed her dark eyes earnestly upon the Duchess as if to fathom the motives of this visit.

"My present proceeding must have already appeared most singular, continued Lavinia, scarcely knowing how to approach the subject which she had

to explain; "and perhaps when my purpose is made known, it may appear more singular still.—But, Oh, madam! whatever cause of offence my husband may have given you, I beseech your ladyship to pardon him!"

Again did Indora fix her eyes upon the Duchess: for she was full of wonderment as to the extent of the revelations which the Duke might have made to his wife, and what topics such revelations might refer. Lavinia suspected what was passing in the Queen's mind: and she hastened to say, "Of those of offence I am utterly ignorant, Lady Indora. All that the Duke has told me, is that he has offended you—that you have the power to injure him—that you are exercising this power.—And, Oh! he is very, very unhappy! But he implores your forbearance—he beseeches you to accept the assurance of his contrition: he would have come to you if he had dared—but on his behalf do I kneel at your feet!"

And with these words, Lavinia sank down to a suppliant posture,—taking Indora's hand and pressing it with the warmth of entreaty, while she looked up with imploring gaze into Indora's countenance. The Queen was profoundly touched by the pathos of this appeal: she saw in a moment that the Duke was making a blind and uninformed instrument of his wife—and she pitied her.

"Rise, madam," she said: "it is no for you to kneel at my feet: although —But rise. I conjure you! Oh, now you weep, Duchess of Marchmont!—and I cannot bear to behold those tears!"

"Lady, you are all goodness," murmured Lavinia; "yes, I read your character in your countenance! You will not be stern unrelenting! Of whatsoever offences my husband may be guilty—and I seek not to know them—"

"Madam, rest assured," interrupted the Queen, with a true queenly dignity "that my honour has suffered not—"

"No, no, lady!" cried the Duchess: "purity and virtue are stamped upon your countenance: they are delineated in your looks! Good heavens! not for a moment would I insult you with such a suspicion. I am entirely at your mercy—I place myself in your hands. If you think fit to narrate the offences of my husband towards you in order to convince me of the magnitude of your generosity in pardoning them, I shall listen: but if on the other hand you will

spare me that which my own heart tells me cannot be otherwise than painful—and if you will pardon him all the same—Oh! I shall bless you—I shall love you as my benefactress!"

"Rise, lady—rise, Duchess of Marchmont!" said Indora, in the tremulous voice and at the same time wiping away a tear, "You have given me no offence—you come in the odour and frankness of your own innocence—you must not kneel as a suppliant—"

"Lady—dear lady—I will kneel," continued the Duchess, "until you grant me this boon. Oh, you know not how much depends upon it! I saw my husband wretched and unhappy: I implored his confidence. He told me that he had enemies—and that you were one. He bade me come to you—and I am here! Grant him your pardon, dear lady—and he will give me back his love as a reward for procuring that forgiveness. You see how much is at stake! It is in your power to restore me that happiness which for years I have lost. Do this, dear lady, and I will love you as a sister for you weep! you are moved—you will accede to my prayer!"

"Rise Duchess of Marchmont," again said Indora, but now speaking in a voice which as all tremulous with emotions. Return to your husband—tell him that for all he has ever done towards me, I forgive him for your sake."

"Dearest, dearest lady!" ejaculated the Duchess pressing Indora's hand to her lips, and then starting up from her suppliant posture; "You have poured joy into my heart—you have already filled my soul with happiness—"

"But understand me well, madam," interrupted the Queen; "I forgive your husband for whatsoever he may have done towards *myself*. Be particular in conveying my decision in the very terms wherein I express it."

"But what means this reservation?" asked Lavinia, her beautiful countenance suddenly becoming so pensively mournful that it went to Indora's heart to be unable to give her such an assurance as would send her away completely happy. "There is something in your words which I cannot understand: there is, as I have expressed it, a reservation—"

"Your husband will comprehend my meaning," answered Indora; and he will at least thank your Grace for what you have done. Return to him, and say those words—that for his offences against

myself I forgive him for *your* sake. Will not to say that it is for *your* sake!"

"Ah, I comprehend!" exclaimed the Duchess, apparently awakening from the stupor of bewilderment "there is some one else in whom you are interested, and against whom my husband has offended! Oh, is it possible? can it be really true that—"

Lavinia stopped short, and sank upon the sofa, overpowered by her feelings. Against whom could her husband have thus offended, if not against Sagoonah? For must not Indora be interested on behalf of her servant? and was it not on this account that she was making such a mental reservation? And now, too, the Queen looked distressed! for she failed not to fathom what was passing in the mind of the Duchess: she comprehended full well the nature of the suspicion which Lavinia entertained.

"Return to the Duke, madam," said the Queen, in a tremulous voice; "return to him, and deliver the message which you have already received from my lips."

The Duchess would have said more: she would have renewed her entreaties—she would again have fallen at the Queen's feet: but her emotions were too strong for the power of utterance—and she remained riveted like a statue to the spot. One last effort did she make to give vent to an impassioned intercession: but she could not—she dared stay no longer—and abruptly pressing the Queen's hand, she hastened from the apartment. When again seated in her carriage, Lavinia threw herself back and burst into an agony of tears: for she could no longer doubt that her own husband was in some unaccountable way connected with the assassin attempt upon Sagoonah.

Nevertheless, as the reader may have perhaps already imagined, the mental reservation made by Indora referred not to Sagoonah—but unto another!

CHAPTER CXLIV.

THE PASTILLES.

WE must now return to the Barker, whom we left when issuing forth from the Duke of Marchmont's mansion with a purse which by the feel he knew to be well filled with notes and gold. Making

his way to some low public-house with which he was acquainted—but where at the same time he felt very sure that he should not be recognised in his Jewish garb—the miscreant regaled himself with plenty of refreshment in the shape of strong liquor—having partaken of which, he retired to bed. It was his purpose to leave the metropolis on the following day, and get to some seaport, whence he might embark for France. We need hardly observe that he took very good care to reckon over the contents of the purse; and he found that the Duke of Marmont had not deceived him; but that the amount was larger than the recompence promised for the crime in respect to Indora.

In the morning the Barker obtained an early sight of the newspapers; and he read the same paragraph which has already been presented to our readers. Nothing could exceed the astonishment of the Barker on finding how tremendous a mistake he had committed: he sat for some minutes utterly lost in amazement at the discovery of this startling fact. Yet how did it matter to him since he had pocketed the reward? But then a thought was gradually stealing into the Barker's mind. It was the death of Indora for which the Duke had bargained; and the same motives, whatever they were, which had prompted his Grace to desire that lady's assassination, must still exist. Thus did Mr. Barnes reason within himself; and thence he calculated that another reward as ample as the one he had just received might possibly be forthcoming from the Duke for the consummation of that crime. Greedy of gold as he was unscrupulous in conduct, he seriously reflected whether it would not be worth his while to remain in London until the night—obtain an interview with the Duke and ascertain his views on the subject. Barney was of dauntless courage in pursuing his career of crime; and his many adventures of the last few months—his escapes, which he termed his “triumph”—together with the success which had hitherto attended the assumption of his disguises, had tended to embolden him to an almost reckless extent. His mind was therefore made up: he would remain in London until the night at all events; and if the Duke acceded to his proposal, he would undertake the new venture—or rather, we should say, the fearfully

correct perpetration of the one originally confided to him.

It by no means suited to the Barker's disposition to remain in-doors all day at the public-house; and moreover such a circumstance in itself would look suspicious. He felt convinced that he was disguised in a style impenetrable to the eyes of the detectives; and there was a sort of thrilling pleasure in thus setting their keenness at naught. He therefore issued forth; but speedily becoming wearied of wandering about, he bethought himself of an expedient which promised some little amusement, and which at the same time would enable him to sit down and rest for hours on some convenient spot. The idea was one which had been suggested during his conversation with Jack Smedley at the time he assumed the Jew's dress at that individual's lodging;—and this idea was to procure a small tray and some pastilles. The articles were speedily purchased; and behold, at about two o'clock in the afternoon, the Barker settled himself on the door-steps of an empty house in one of the thorough-fares at the West End of the town.

While there stationed, Barney the Barker reflected upon many things—and amongst others, upon his most recent proceedings in respect to Jack Smedley.

“Jack's a nasty cowardly dog,” said the Barker to himself; “or else he wouldn't have played me such a scampish trick as that,—getting hold of my blunt and belting off like a shot! But I was even with him though: I precious soon made the scoundrel disgorging, as the sayin' is. Nevertheless, he is a dirty rascal; and if he could have his revenge, he would be sure to take it fast enough. But one thing is certain: he wouldn't go and give himself up merely to have the pleasure of informing agin me; and it's unkinmen sure that he couldn't inform against me unless he *did* give himself up. So all things considered, I don't think there's no harm to be feared on in that there quarter.”

Mr. Barnes had arrived at this satisfactory conclusion, when on raising his eyes, whom should he behold crossing the street and advancing towards him, but old Jonathan Carnaby? The sexton of Woodbridge did not look by any means the better for his debauch of the night but one previously: on the contrary, he was pale and ill, and seemed as

if he had arisen from a bed of sickness. The fact was that the stupefying drug used by the Barker, had produced a very injurious effect on the sexton.

"By jingo, I'm done for!" said the Barker to himself, as Jonathan advanced straight towards him: "he'll twig me through this cursed black gaberdine and this thunderin' grey beard—But I'm a fool! Old Jonathan's eyes isn't half so sharp as the detective chaps' visual organs; and *they* can't see through me no more than if I was one of them postasses. I'll look as serious as if I'd just come out of the sinnygog."

"How do you sell your pastilles, my good old man?" inquired the sexton of Woodbridge, fumbling at the bottom of his pockets for a few halfpence.

The Barker answered the question very curtly indeed, but imitating the Jewish accent as much as he could; for he had not forgotten the conversation he had overheard at the public-house on the preceding night, when it was stated that Jonathan Carnabie had been struck by his "lingo" at the time he was beguiling him with tales of his respectability.

"Well, I'll buy a few pastilles," said Jonathan: "for my landlady seems to be very fond of them—and as she is exceedingly kind and civil, I must make her a little present."

The Barker received the copper coins—gave the suitable number of pastilles—and eyeing the old sexton askance, hoped that he would at once take himself off. But it was not so. Jonathan possessed an inquiring disposition: and he thought that as he had come to London, it was his duty to make himself acquainted with every matter on which he was previously uninformed, and however trivial its interest.

"I never saw pastilles before I came to this great city," he said. "How are they made?"

"Chalk," was the curt response.

"Chalk? indeed!" said Mr. Carnabie. "What! black chalk? I never heard of it before."

"Charcoal, then," growled the Barker, inwardly venting a bitter imprecation against the old sexton's visual organs and limbs.

"Ah! charcoal, eh? And how are they scented?"

"Don't know," rejoined the Barker.

Old Jonathan—suspecting not for a single instant who it was that stood thus

disguised before him—said in a somewhat angry tone, "well, at all events you might give a person a civil answer—particularly when he has laid out money with you."

But the Barker vouchsafed no response; and Jonathan walked away muttering something sulkily between his teeth.

"He didn't know me—he didn't suspect nuffin!" thought the Barker chuckling to himself. "The old rascal! I thought at one moment his eyes was piercein' like needles through this here gaberdine and beard. Howsoever—"

As this moment the Barker beheld the Duke of Marchmont advancing on foot along the street. His grace had just come from assisting at the installation of Mrs. Oxenden in a splendidly furnished house which he had taken for her reception; and he was gratified on finding that such was her love of pleasure and of gold, she would be sure to keep ten thousand acres relative to as many crimes, if it only suited her selfish purposes. Such was the impression he had formed of her during an hour's conversation; and he felt himself safe enough in that quarter. But was he so in other respects? His wife had faithfully reported the particulars and the issue of her interview with Indora; and therefore if he were satisfied in respect to Mrs. Oxenden, he was full of apprehensions in respect to the Oriental lady.

"She will forgive me all that I have done towards herself!" the Duke kept thinking within his own mind as he slowly paced along: "but this means that she will not or cannot forgive me in respect to what I have done towards others in whom she is interested. And all things considered in whom can she be so interested as in *him* who is as surely alive—who is in England—and whom I have seen? Yes—they must be well acquainted—it is only too evident; and her visit Oakland was a trick—startagem, devised on his behalf—doubtless suggested by him too! It is this eastern woman only whom I fear: it is Indora only whom I apprehend. Were she out of the way, he would become powerless: he dares not come forward—he is compelled to work through the means of an agent. Yes—if Indora were put out of my path, I should feel myself safe—I might defy the whole world!"

Here the Duke of Marchmont suddenly stopped short, not only in his

musings but likewise in his walk: for on raising his eyes, whom should he behold at the distance of a dozen yards but Barney the Barker? The Duke could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses; and yet it was so. There stood Barney dressed in the Jewish costume, with his tray of pastilles in his hand.

"This fellow is mad, to remain thus in London!" thought the Duke within himself: but the next instant a feeling of joy shot through his heart.

Drawing out his purse, and keeping it in his hand, so as to have the appearance of being about to bestow alms on the seeming Jewish mendicant, the Duke accosted him. There were very few people passing by at the time; and not a policeman was in sight.

"What are you doing here?" inquired Marchmont, in a hurried manner and in a low voice as he still kept playing with his purse for appearance's sake.

"A sellin' of these werry pretty little things at a werry moderate rate," responded the Barker. "But jokin' apart, my lord—I was only a killin' time until evening should draw in—when I meant to take some steps to get an interview with your Grace."

"What for?" demanded the Duke hastily.

"Only, my lord," was the reply, "because the business wasn't done proper last night—though, by jingo! it wasn't my fault; for if that cursed young woman chose to lag herself out in her mistress's dress, how the deuce was I to know anythink about it? She had a well down over her face——"

"Yes, yes—I have read all about it," interrupted the Duke; "and I see full well that it was a mistake on your part. I do not blame you——"

"And that there mistake," rejoined the Barker, "can be put all right and straight; and the proper goose can be cooked if your lordship chooses to say the word."

"Meet me this evening in the lane at the back of my stables," said the Duke hurriedly; and then, with an appearance of ostentation for the behoof of the passers-by, he flung a shilling into the Barker's tray.

"There! I knowed how it would be," thought Barney to himself: these here aristocratic chaps always will have their way when they once takes it into their head, and as it suits my lord's purpose that the Lady Indocora is to have her

hash settled, settled it will be! But, by jingo! here's that old scoundrel again!"

This mental ejaculation bore reference to old Jonathan Carnabie, who was returning down the street; and for an instant the Barker thought of pitching away his stock-in-trade and taking to his heels. But now there were several persons passing at the moment; and such a proceeding would naturally excite suspicions that there was something wrong; whereas in respect to Jonathan it might be a false alarm after all. The Barker's gaze swept rapidly up and down the street: no policeman was in sight—no one who at all answered to his tolerably accurate notion or knowledge of a detective. Therefore the Barker remained at his post—but inwardly resolving to decamp the instant Jonathan Carnabie should be again out of sight. It must be admitted that he now cursed the unnecessary folly which had exposed him to such perils; and his mind was by no means reassured when he beheld the sexton of Woodbridge making straight towards him. But as he drew near, the Barker saw that he had a pleasant and agreeable expression of countenance; and he said within him self, "I wonder what the old dog wants now?"

"I will buy a few more of your pastilles," said Jonathan. "My landlady tells me that they are exceedingly cheap, and also very good."

"How many?" asked the Barker, in a feigned voice, and at the same time imitating as well as he was able the accents of a Jew of the lower order.

Jonathan stated the number he required, and drew forth the price. The Barker pocketed the money, still eyeing the old sexton askance; but there was really nothing in Jonathan's looks to warrant his apprehension. But we must leave these two individuals for a few minutes thus standing together, while we relate some particulars which are essential to the progress of our story.

As the reader has seen, rewards had been offered for the apprehension of the Smedleys and the Barker; and we may add that no efforts had been left untied by the police to get upon the track of either or all of these individuals. The horrible revelations made by the subterranean of the gold beater's house in Lambeth, had excited the public feeling to a high degree; and the officers of justice therefore considered it absolutely necessary that the miscreants should be

hunted down and brought to the bar of a criminal tribunal. But if in such a case it were desirable to capture a particular one rather than the others, this one was the Barker. His complicity in the hideous murder of the lawyer Pollard at Liverpool—his escape from the gaol in that town—and his daring, desperate conduct towards the police-officials at the Smedleys' house, were motives in addition to all others which rendered it absolutely necessary for the security of society that such a diabolical fiend should be outshort in his iniquitous career. But, as we have seen, the Barker as well as the Smedley's had hitherto evaded the pursuit of justice.

The Secretary for the Home Department, acting upon the representations of the police authorities: determined to take a step which it was hoped would have the effect of bringing the gang of miscreants within the range of the law's operation. Handbills were accordingly printed, proclaiming that the mercy of the Crown would be to a certain degree extended to any one of the gang (the Barker himself excepted) who would give such information as should place the others in the hands of the police; or the same benefits would be extended to that one of the said gang who would surrender up the Barker alone to the authorities. These bills were printed early on the morning of which we have been writing; and they began to be circulated in the metropolis at the time the Barker took his station at the West End, disguised as a Jew, and with his tray of pastilles before him.

The police-officers were active in scattering the bills amidst the low quarters of London,—knowing that in these districts they were far more likely to have the effect of attaining their object than in the superior districts of the metropolis. It happened that one of the first to these printed proclamations that were issued, fell into the hands of Jack Smedley, as in some new disguise he was wandering through the district of St. Luke's in as wretched a state of mind as can be well conceived. On reading the handbill the gold-beater was at once smitten with the thought of availing himself of the benefit which it held out. He understood its meaning full well; it signified that whoever would turn round upon his accomplices should experience the mercy of the Crown so far as to have his life spared, though

with the certainty of sustaining the application of the next degree of punishment,—namely, transportation for the rest of his days.

Jack Smedley was, as the reader has seen, a veritable coward in most respects—although having hardihood sufficient to plunge into crime when led on, encouraged, and assisted by others. But the idea of the gibbet was for him fraught with such terrors that it was a matter of surprise it had not restrained him from crime altogether;—unless indeed we must take into account the circumstance that every man when committing a deed of turpitude, hugs the belief that it will never be discovered. And now, upon reading this proclamation, Jack Smedley beheld the means of saving his life—Aye! and not only of saving his life, but also of revenging himself on the Barker for the last event which had marked their intercourse. What to Smedley was transportation for the remainder of his existence, if he could only save that existence from a horrible and ignominious fate? To have the power of putting out from his imagination that dark sinister object which was looming before his mental vision—to escape from the haunting influence of the sombre gillows and all the dread paraphernalia of death,—this was indeed happiness, although at the same time he should be doomed to fix his eyes on the far-off regions of eternal exile! Not many moments did the gold-beater waste in deliberation; his mind was speedily made up; and with the proclamation in his hand, he set out on his search after Barney the Barker.

We have said that the he was wearing a new sort of disguise; but it is not worth while to pause and describe its details. Suffice it to say, that profiting by the hints which he had received from the Barker the evening but one previous, he had made such alterations in his appearance as were indeed well calculated to defy the scrutiny of the most lynxeyed detective. Accordingly, he made his way through the streets of London, without exciting any suspicion, and without attracting towards himself a single suspicious look on the part of any constable whom he encountered. He knew enough of the Barker's desperate character to be well aware that if he were still in the metropolis, he was just as likely to be haunting one of the

best neighbourhoods as to be lurking about in one of the worst.

"He is pretty sure," thought Jack Smedley within himself, "to keep on that old Hebrew disguise: for he knows it to be the best he could possibly have; and notwithstanding what took place betwixt him and me, he can't for a moment fancy that I should think of betraying him. Therefore it isn't on my account he would leave London. Besides, didn't he tell me that he had got a little business in hand which would keep him here for a few days?—and Barney is not the man to make himself scarce before his work is done. Depend upon it he is in London!—and if so, I will have him. My own life depends upon it! Aye—and for that matter, I would give up Bab likewise—Anything to save myself from swinging on the gallows! Besides, hasn't Bab led me a precious life—always teasing and tormenting me—calling me a coward—domineering over me—making me do exactly what she chose—ordering me about as if I was her slave? Yes, yes—I have no compunction now: my own safety in all that I have to think of!"

Such were the thoughts which passed through Jack Smedley's mind as he wandered about the streets of London searching for the Barker. At length, while making his way through a quarter at the West End, just as he reached the top of a street into which he was about to turn, he caught sight of a dress the aspect of which instantaneously sent a thrill of joy through his heart. It was assuredly the Barker!—there could be no mistake! The beard—the hat—the gabardine,—all were the same!—and then, too, he was evidently selling pastilles; and in his discourse with Smedley at the lodging of the latter, he had with coarse jocularity declared that it only required this addition to the circumstances of his disguise in order to render that disguise complete.

Jack Smedley literally trembled with the feelings that now agitated him. The safety of his own life appeared to be within his reach;—but what if the Barker should still escape him? He flung his glances hurriedly up and down the street: not a policeman was to be seen. He looked again towards the Barker; and he now beheld him in discourse with a strange-looking old man, whom our readers will recognise as Jonathan Carnable. Again did the gold-beater

fling his glances around: but still no policeman!—and he did not dare leave the spot—he did not dare lose sight of Barney the Barker for even a single minute, lest that minute should be sufficient to enable him to vanish altogether.

Jonathan Carnable had now finished his second bargain with the Barker, and was moving away: he was coming in the direction of that extremity of the street where Jack Smedley posted himself. But, ah! the Barker was retreating in the opposite direction. The gold-beater's first impulse was to give the alarm—to cry "Stop thief!" and thus set numbers upon his track. But a second thought convinced him of the impolicy of this proceeding. In the first place, the Barker might possibly escape: Smedley was not well acquainted with this particular quarter of the town, and he knew not what by-streets might lead off from the main one along which Barney was now proceeding. And then again, it was just possible that it might not be Barney at all—but a veritable Hebrew who had happened to wear a costume precisely similar to that which Smedley had lent to his accomplice. All these considerations passed with lightning speed through the mind of the gold-beater; and for a few instants he was bewildered how to act. A thought however struck him, and he accosted Jonathan Carnable.

"You were talking to that old Jew?" he said, with quick utterance.

"I was buying pastilles of him," responded the sexton, somewhat started by this abrupt address from a total stranger.

"Did you see nothing queer in his look, sir?" demanded Jack—"nothing of a hang-dog expression of countenance?"

"Well, I did not take particular notice," replied Jonathan; "but now that you mention the circumstance—"

"Did he look like a Jew, sir?" exclaimed Jack Smedley. "But did you happen to notice whether there was a rent in the front part of his gabardine—just about here?"—and the gold-beater indicated the left breast of his own coat.

"To be sure!" rejoined the old sexton: "I did observe it. But what—"

"It's all right, then!" ejaculated Smedley. "And now, sir, pray be good enough to hasten back after that Jew—just get him into conversation—do any

thing to engage his attention for a few minutes! He is an old scamp—the police are looking for him—but don't let him know that there is anything suspicious!"

"Dear me!" said Jonathan; "what a place this London is!"

"Pray be off, sir, and do as I ask you! You will have time to overtake him! There! he is stopping!—a woman is buying something of him! Be off with you, sir—and keep him engaged for a few minutes!"

Jonathan Carnaby accordingly retraced his way—while Jack Smedley, full of feverish suspense, again looked round in search of a policeman. Meanwhile the Barker, thankful at having got rid of the Woodbridge sexton, had been beating a retreat as fast as his assumed character of an old Jew would permit him to proceed; and he was near the extremity of the street when he was stopped by an elderly dame who began to bargain with him for some pastilles. The Barker inwardly vented his rage at being thus detained by means of a bitter imprecation; and he gruffly bade the dame take as many pastilles as she chose and pay for them exactly what she liked. But she was a slow-going old creature; she counted a pile of pastilles with the utmost deliberation; and then she fumbled in her pocket for some halfpence to pay for the purchase. The Barker—who had plenty of money about him, and cared not one fig for the expected halfpence—was ready to burst with impatience; but he dared not even for an instant do ought that might create a suspicion. The old dame drew out a small packet of halfpence wrapped in a piece of paper; and as she deliberately opened this paper, the Barker's eye caught sight of the name of Smedley amongst the printed contents thereof, when he beheld his own name; and the words "the money of the Crown" likewise met his view.

"Here, my poor old man—here's a thruppence for you," said the dame; "and I'm sure I hope the money will do you as much good as if you was a Christian."

"Please to leave it wrapped up in the paper, ma'am," said the Barker; "it's rayther more convenient to carry."

"Well, so it be," said the dame who was disposed to be particularly loquacious. "I got the change just now in paying my weekly bill at the baker's. And what do you think? While I was

a-standing quite promiscuous like a talking at the counter, in comes a policeman and pitches a packet of handbills; and he says, says he, 'I say Mr. Oatoake, just distribute these among your customers—more particular among them as brings bakin's because it's the poorer orders.'"

"To be sure ma'am!" said the Barker, growing desperately impatient. "Beg your pardon—but I've got a little appointment with our Rabbi at the synagogue—"

"Oh! I won't detain you, my good man," continued the dame. "I was only going to say that when the policeman left the shop. Mr. Oatoake says, says he, 'These bills come in precious handy to wrap up halfpence.'"

"No doubt of it, ma'am!"—and the Barker, now unable to restrain his impatience any longer, snatched the handbill from her grasp and burst away from her.

"Well, I never did see a poor old Jew like that take such long scudon before said the dame to herself, as she stood for some moments looking after the Barker. "But poor man! he's no doubt very particular in saying his prayers regular, and is pretty nigh as good as a Christian after all."

Meanwhile the Barker was pursuing his way; and with the little handbill laid upon his tray, was reading its contents.

"Here's a pretty go!" he said to himself. "If the Government is a man of any feeling, he ought to be ashamed of himself to try and catch a fellow to turn round upon his pale."

At the same time it was with no very pleasurable sensations that Mr. Barnes perused the handbill: for he saw thereby that the authorities were terribly earnest in their pursuit of him. Moreover, his thoughts speedily riveted themselves upon Jack Smedley; and he said to himself, "It's high time I should hook it! The appointment with the Duke can't worry well be kept. I must show London a clean pair of heels afore I'm an hour older."

But at this moment he felt a tap upon his shoulder; and turning round with a start that made his unsold pastilles dance upon the tray, he beheld Jonathan Carnaby again. The Barker could scarcely restrain himself from knocking the old man down and then taking to his heels; but a glance towards the end

of the street showed him that several persons were passing and he dared not thus rashly thrust his head into the lion's mouth. It struck him that there was something singular in the old sexton's look; and then too, this third visit, naturally filled the Barker guilty mind with misgivings.

"I want a few more pastilles," said Jonathan: "they seem so good—and you are such a worthy man——"

"Cuss his eyes!" growled the Barker, who had the greatest difficulty in containing himself.

"What did you say?" asked Carnabie, looking up into the pretended Jew's countenance: and now—being already prepared to view him with suspicion, from all that Jack Smedley had said—Jonathan was at once struck with the peculiar expression of the Barker's eyes; so that he could not prevent himself from starting at the idea of the villain's identity flashed to his mind.

At that very instant a couple of policemen burst round the corner of a diverging street which was close by; and the Barker was seized upon at the moment that he beheld his recognition on the part of the old sexton.

"At last we have got you!" exclaimed one of the constables, with his staff in readiness to knock the miscreant down if he attempted resistance.

Barney struggled desperately,—giving vent at the same time to terrible imprecations: but the very gaberdine which served as his disguise encumbered him now—and he was quickly overpowered. It was some minutes before Jonathan Carnabie could recover from his astonishment at having thus learnt that beneath the garb of a venerable Jew was concealed the individual who had sought his life at Woodbridge, and who had so recently imposed upon him with such success in London. A cab was speedily called: the Barker was placed in it, and at once conveyed to Bow Street,—old Jonathan Carnabie followed to listen to the proceedings, and to give his evidence, if needful.

We should observe that Jack Smedley, immediately after separating from the old sexton, had observed a policeman come sauntering round the corner of the street where he was posted; and he sped to assist him.

"Hasten! said Jack: "there—in that direction—and arrest the old Jew. He is Barney the Barker!"

"The Barker!" ejaculated the constable. "Here's a capture! But I can't track him alone: he's the most desperate villain in all England. Will you come and help?"

"No—not I?" answered Jack, shrinking with horror from the idea of daring the law in vengeance of his accomplice in the first moment of the desperado's fury at finding that he was betrayed.

"Well, where is he?" demanded the constable.

"Near the end of that street," was Jack Smedley's impatient answer.

"Then I'll nab him!" quickly rejoined the constable: "there's another officer close by!"

With these words the policeman turned upon his heel, and hastened into the street which ran parallel with that where the Barker was:—and procuring the assistance of a brother-official whom he encountered at a short distance, he and his comrade sped along a narrow street connecting the two above-mentioned. The capture was effected in the manner already described: and Smedley beheld it from under a gateway leading into a mews. He saw the cab arrive to bear Barney off to Bow Street; and thither Jack Smedley hastened on foot, in order to turn approver on behalf of the Government, that he might thereby save his own life.

Though it was now late in the afternoon, the magistrate was still sitting at Bow Street; and the Barker, dressed in his Jewish apparel, was placed in the dock. The news speedily spread throughout the neighbourhood that the formidable Barney was taken: and the court was in a very short time crowded to excess. One of the constables who had captured the criminal, deposed to the effect that he had been accosted by a stranger who gave him the information upon which he had acted. The Superintendent of Police for that district then called the magistrate's attention to the fact that the prisoner had escaped from Liverpool gaol, to which he had been some time back committed on a charge of murder: and the officer produced the placard published on the occasion, specifying the particulars of that escape and offering a reward for his re-apprehension.

"There are likewise, your worship," added the Superintendent, "grave and serious charges against this man arising out of certain discoveries made at a

house in Lambeth, and which your worship doubtless bears in mind."

"It does not appear to me necessary to go into that matter," said the magistrate: "the course to be pursued in the present instance is clear enough. All that I have to do is to satisfy myself of the identity of the prisoner now in the dock with the one who escaped from the gaol at Liverpool; and to order his transfer to that town, that he may duly take his trial at the next Assizes holden for the Northern Circuit. What evidence, Mr. Superintendent, have you to establish this identity?"

"If the prisoner, your worship, was stripped of his disguise," responded the official thus addressed, "there are no doubt plenty of persons here who could identify him."

"Please your worship," said one of the constables who had captured the Barker, "I wanted to take off all that hair from his face: but he says it is stuck on so tight that it can only be removed by hot water—and there was not time——"

"You had better remove the prisoner for a few minutes," interrupted the magistrate, "and let the false hair be taken off."

"Please your worship," exclaimed a man who had just entered the court, and was now making his way through the crowd, "I can identify him as he is!—it was I who gave the information that caused his arrest!"

All eyes were turned upon the speaker; but it was not necessary for Barney to look at his countenance to see who he was; he had already recognised the voice—and a low but savage imprecation fell from his lips as he found that he was after all betrayed by Jack Smedley. The miscreant clenched his fist and ground his teeth with the deep concentrated rage that filled his soul: but he was impotent for purposes of mischief; otherwise he would have flown like a tiger at Smedley, to throttle or to tear him to pieces. There he was, however, powerless, and under complete restraint—shut up in the dock—manacled upon his wrists—a policeman on his right hand—a policeman on his left—and numerous other constables close by to seize upon him at the least demonstration of violence.

Jack Smedley ascended the witness box; and having been sworn, he at once addressed the magistrate with a hasty and excited volubility.

"Please your worship, that man is Barney the Barker—and I can prove it! My name is John Smedley; and I claim the benefit of the promise held out in this handbill. I was the means of handing over the Barker to the constables; and I have now come to give myself into custody."

The announcement of Jack Smedley's name produced a considerable sensation in the court; for every one recognised it as that of the master of the house in Lambeth the hideous revelations of which had created so great an excitement throughout the metropolis.

"Don't believe a word, your worship, that is told you agin me," said the Barker, in a sort of half-dogged, half-submissive tone. "I'm a poor, honest Jew which gets his livin' in a respectable manner: and I can bring fifty witnesses to prove it. As for that there constable, I never said nothink of the sort about not being able to take off my beard, without hot water. It's a nat'ral beard, your worship—and as fast on to my chin as your worship's—whiskers is to your cheeks. And as for Jack Smedley, everybody knows he is a white-livered, sneakin' scoundrel——"

"It is rather singular," interjected the magistrate, "that if you are a respectable Jew you should have any such particular knowledge of the man Smedley. But we will soon ascertain whether your beard is false or not——"

"Now that I took alone, I can see plain enough it is a false one, your worship," said the constable on the Barker's right hand: "and the moustaehios too."

"I can identify him, your worship!" exclaimed another voice from amidst the crowd: and old Jonathan Carnable now stepped into the witness-box.

His evidence was to the effect that he was sexton of the parish church of Woodbridge in Westmoreland—that he had engaged the Barker as an assistant not knowing who he was at the time—that the fellow had intended to rob and murder him—but that his criminal design had been frustrated by the sudden arrival of assistance. Jonathan further stated that he had been hooused and robbed by the Barker in London; and he excited some merriment in the Court by describing how he had purchased pastilles of the false Jew without for an instant suspecting that his old acquaintance the Barker was concealed beneath that disguise.

"Well, I tell you what, then," said Barney, who now began to think that where better after all if he were to be transferred to Liverpool, inasmuch as the journey thither might possibly offer some facilities of escape, "I'm a considerate man in my way—and don't see no use of botherin' the justice. So I'll just admit for form's sake that I am the gentleman which they say I be—Mr. Barnes, to wit. So there's an end of the matter."

"In that case," observed the magistrate, "I have nothing more to do than direct that you, Mr. Superintendent, will take the necessary measures for conveying the prisoner to Liverpool. The clerk will make out the depositions of what has taken place, and you may start with your prisoner as soon as you think fit."

The Barker was now removed from the dock; and as the cells attached to the Court itself were considered to be stronger and more secure than those belonging to the station-house on the opposite side of Bow Street, the prisoner was consigned to one of the former. Jack Smedley was then placed in the dock; and his own confession was committed to take his trial for the murder of an elderly person who passed by the name of Smith, and who was lodging at his house in Lambeth some time back. But he was given to understand by the magistrate that the promise held out by the Secretary of State would no doubt be fulfilled towards him. All these proceedings occupied the magistrate until nearly eight o'clock in the evening: so that the clerk of the court had no leisure to commence the depositions in the Barker's case until those in Jack Smedley's had been completed in order that the latter might be transferred to Horse-monger Lane Gaol.

CHAPTER CXV.

THE ORILL.

It happened that at the time, Barney the Barker was standing at the dock at Bow Street, the Duke of Marchmont was visiting Covent Garden Market, in order to purchase a handsome present of fruits and flowers as a present for Mrs. Oxendon, whom it was vitally important that he should conciliate by

every means which suggested themselves—either by substantial bounties or by agreeable little attentions. While he was engaged in making those purchases, the rumour reached his ears that the notorious Barker had been arrested in a Jewish garb, and was then under examination at Bow Street. For an instant a cold terror seized upon the Duke of Marchmont: but the next moment he reflected that the prisoner would not scarcely for his own sake—and at least not in this early stage of the proceedings—confess to other crimes than that with which he was charged: for the same person who mentioned in the fruiterer's shop the circumstance of the Barker's capture added that the magistrate was merely seeking to establish his identity in order to transfer him to Liverpool.

The Duke, having paid for his purchases, and intimated to what address they were to be sent, issued from the market. He dismissed his carriage, which was waiting for him; and wandered for some little while about the adjacent streets, reflecting upon the course which it were expedient for him to pursue; for he felt how necessary it was that he should render the villain some kind of assistance if possible. At length his mind was made up; and he looked about him for a shop where articles of ironmongery were sold. He speedily found one; and entering it, made a variety of purchases, amounting to the value of several pounds. He ordered them to be sent to his mansion in Belgrave Square,—at the same time depositing his card upon the counter to indicate who he was. But while the shopman, having made many obsequious bows on reading the name upon the card, was making out the receipt, the Duke abstracted a file from the counter and concealed it in his pocket. As a matter of course this theft was not perpetrated for the miserable purpose of evading the payment of a few pence for the file; the large purchases which the Duke had made were merely a pretext for his visit to that shop—but it did not suit his purpose to include a file amongst those purchases. He therefore stealthily helped himself to one.

Issuing from the shop, the Duke returned into Covent Garden Market, in order to pick up whatsoever fresh information he could in respect to the proceedings at Bow Street; and he now

learnt that the Barker, having admitted his name and identity, was under order of removal with the least possible delay to Liverpool. The Duke however found that another case—namely, that of Jack Smedley—was occupying the magistrate's attention, and that great crowds were collected in the court and in the street. He accordingly loitered about the neighbourhood until this case was terminated and the crowds had dispersed: he then repaired to the Bow Street police-office and inquired for the magistrate. But his worship had just taken his departure; and the Duke was referred to the Inspector.

On being conducted into the Inspector's room, the Duke of Marchmont gave his card, and at once experienced the most cringing civility.

"Being in Covent Garden, Market," said his Grace, assuming a careless off-hand manner, "I happened to hear that a notorious criminal disguised as a Jew had been this afternoon arrested in a particular street at the West End of the town. Now, I have a strong reason for wishing to have a sight of this individual, if it be not in contravention of your rules or regulations."

"Certainly, my lord," answered the Inspector with a low bow; "you shall see the man. But might I ask—"

"Oh, yes! there is no secret in the matter," responded the Duke with a smile. "I was about to explain myself. The fact is—But, Ah! doubtless, now I bethink me, the prisoner's person was searched?"

"To be sure, my lord," replied the Inspector.

"Then you can tell me whether a diamond ring," continued the Duke, "was found about him—a ring set with a single diamond—"

"No, my lord," answered the Inspector. "A very considerable sum of money in notes and gold was found upon the prisoner—but nothing else of any value. May I ask why your Grace—"

"To be sure!" ejaculated the Duke, with an air of most condescending frankness: "a few words will suffice to explain the matter. I happened to be passing this afternoon through the very identical street where the pretended Jew was subsequently arrested; and believing him to be really what he seemed, I stopped to give him alms. For this purpose I took out my purse; and in so doing, drew off my glove, I bestowed

some small coin upon him—and continued my way. Scarcely had I reached the end of the street, when I missed a diamond ring from my finger. I felt tolerably certain I must have unconsciously drawn it off along with my glove—"

"No doubt of it, my lord," observed the Inspector.

"I hastened back to the spot, where I found the seeming Jew still standing; and I asked him if he had observed a diamond ring lying in the street after I had left him? He answered in the negative: but it struck me at the time there was some confusion in the fellow's manner—"

"No doubt of it, my lord!" said the Inspector: "your Grace may depend upon it that the accouder found the ring."

"That is what I have come to ascertain," said the Duke. "But if it were not discovered upon his person—"

"Nevertheless, my lord, he has got it," interrupted the Inspector: "rest assured he has got it!"

"Got it!" said the Duke, affecting a bewildered air.

"To be sure, my lord!" rejoined the official. "Of course your Grace is ignorant of the tricks these scoundrels are up to: but there can be no doubt that he swallowed the ring."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Marchmont, now putting on a look of immense astonishment.

"Or else, perhaps," added the Inspector, "it is just possible that he may have so cleverly concealed it in some part of his dress, that it escaped the notice of the constable who searched him."

"As he is now in a position in which the ring can be of no possible use to him," continued the Duke, "he may perhaps be inclined to give it up to me—supposing your latter suggestion to be the true one, and that he has it concealed about his person. It is not for the value of the ring in a pecuniary sense—but it was given to me by a deceased relative—"

"I will go and speak to the prisoner, my lord," exclaimed the Inspector.

"Thank you—I shall feel grateful," said the Duke; and he suffered the Inspector to get as far as the door, ere he exclaimed, "But when I think of it, the villain is much less likely to acknowledge the fact to you than he is to me."

Persons of his class invariably regard the functionaries of the law in the light of enemies whom they have a right to baffle and set at defiance to the utmost of their power."

"True my lord," said the Inspector; "this is unfortunately too much the case."

"Well then, my lord," continued the Duke, "if I were to see the fellow, he might perhaps do for me that which he would not do for you."

"If your Grace has no objection to stop across the street to the cell where he is confined: for I regret that I have not the power to order him to be brought here into your Grace's presence."

"Neither would I have you do such a thing," exclaimed the Duke. "I will accompany you."

The Inspector bowed; and Marchmont went with him across the street to the police office. Procuring the key from the gaoler—and taking a lantern, or bull's eye, in his hand—the Inspector conducted the Duke of Marchmont to the back part of the premises, where a low door admitted them into a narrow little yard—or rather uncovered passage—whence the cells opened.

"Will your Grace speak to him through the wicket?" asked the Inspector in a whisper: "or will your lordship enter the cell?"

"Oh, with your permission I will enter it," replied the Duke: "for them he may possibly recognise me as having given him aims to-day."

"I am afraid, my lord," whispered the Inspector, "that if your Grace expects any display of gratitude on that account, you will be disappointed: for he is one of the most diabolical scoundrels as yet unhung."

"We can but try," responded Marchmont, "I suppose he is chained?"

"He is only manacled, my lord: he has got handcuffs upon him; and these we consider sufficient to ensure his safe custody | especially when your Grace is informed that the cells are of considerable strength."

Having thus spoken, the Inspector unlocked the door of the cell; and as he flung the light of the bull's eye inside, the Barker was discovered sitting upon the wooden bench and reclining back in the angle of the walls. He still retained his disguise—with the exception of the wig, which had been taken off before he stood in the dock in the police-court;

but the long grey beard and moustache continued affixed to the lower part of his countenance.

"Well, I say," growled the Barker, not immediately recognising the Duke of Marchmont, "are any of you chaps coming to bring me some hot water to get off this cursed beard? I know as how my face isn't a werry'naome one; but that's no reason why I should have peel off all the skin and leave my chin as raw as a bit of bullock's liver."

"I will see that you have water presently," said the Inspector: "it has no doubt been forgotten in the hurry of business. Here's a gentleman who wishes to speak to you."

"A gentleman? exclaimed the Barker. "Who, the devil——"

"Lend me the lantern, Mr. Inspector, if you please," said the Duke, purposely speaking deliberately so that his voice might be recognised by the Barker,—who his Grace knew full well, would be shrewd and cautious enough not to show any inconvenient sign of recognition.

Marchmont entered the cell with the bull's eyes; and for a moment holding it so that its light fell upon his own features, he darted upon the Barker a look which enjoined prudence and caution: so that Barney, at once taking the hint, inwardly rejoiced at the presence of his Grace, considered that best thing he could do was to remain silent and take his cue from the nobleman.

"Do you not recollect," continued Marchmont, "that I stopped and gave you a shilling to-day, when you were standing in the street?"

"Well, I think I do," replied the Barker.

"And you remember that I returned," continued his Grace, "and asked you something about a ring?"

"Well, I do recollect summut of that also," was the prisoner's response.

"And you deny having seen that ring which I dropped?"

"To be sure: cause why I didn't see it."

"I know you said so at the time," continued the Duke of Marchmont: "but I had my doubts then—and I have them still more strongly now. Come, my man, confess the truth. That ring is of no use to you——"

"Not a bit," replied the Barker.

"But it is much valued me," proceeded Marchmont, "because it was a gift

from a relative who is now no more. Situated as you are, unhappy man——"

"Yes—a devilish pretty situation it is," said the Burker. "Nice easy seat, this—pleasant airy cell—no smell of the drains—plenty of good grub—a bottle of the best wine—and a set of say-nothink-to-nobody kind of fellows that doesn't take you by the scruff of the neck and shove you along when they wants you to move from place to place."

"Come, none of your nonsense, now!" exclaimed the Inspector sharply as he stood just behind the Duke.

"Oh! that's you, Mr. Jack-in-office—is it?" said the Burker.

"Pray do not irritate him," whispered the Duke hastily to the official. "I am sure he has got my ring; and I think I can do something with him;"—then again turning to the Burker Marchmont said, "Come, my man, it will do you no good to deny the fact."

"Well, I'll tell you what it is," interrupted Barney, who was at no loss to conjecture that the Duke wanted to speak to him alone: "if so be as I've got summat to tell, I shan't tell it in the presence of that Jack-in-office. He's insulted me—he's wounded my feelin's in their most sensitive pint——"

"Mr. Inspector," whispered the Duke, now again hastily turning towards the official, "may I venture to beg that you will just step away from the threshold of the door?"

"To be sure, my lord," responded the officer, who was all obsequiousness. "I do really believe your Grace will manage the fellow yet; but if not I will have his person searched once more."

"Meanwhile let me try what I can do" whispered Marchmont.

The Inspector instantaneously quitted the threshold of the open door, and began pacing to and fro in the little yard, purposely making his boots stamp heavily on the pavement, so as to convince the Burker that he was no longer listening.

"Come now, my good man," said the Duke, thus speaking in order to keep up appearances in case the Inspector should overhear what was passing. "You may as well give me up that ring; and money is now of any service to you, I shall cheerfully pay for the restoration of a jewel on which I set so much value."

While thus speaking, the Duke of Marchmont produced the file—choosing

a moment when the Inspector's footsteps sounded from the extremity of the little yard; and at the same time his Grace bent a significant look upon the Burker. The prisoner clutched that file—nodded knowingly—and thrust it into his waistcoat-pocket.

"Perhaps they will soon search you again?" hastily whispered the Duke; and then he at once exclaimed aloud. "This denial is ridiculous! I know you *must* have my ring."

"Of course he has," muttered the Inspector, who caught those words while turning round close by the door.

"No—they won't search me again," was the quick whisper which now came from the Burker's lips.

"I tell you that it is useless to persist in this denial," exclaimed the Duke; then taking a diamond ring from his pocket, he added in a low under-tone, "Give it up to me in a few minutes."

"I tell you I haven't got it!" vociferated the Burker as he received the ring and nodded significantly.

"But all appearances are against you, my man," rejoined the Duke; then again lowering his voice, he hastily added, "If you succeed in escaping, write to me—and I will send you more money;"—at the same time he thrust some compactly crumpled up bank-notes into the miscreant's hand.

There was a further semblance of accusation and remonstrance on the part of the Duke, as well as of sturdy denial on that of the Burker,—until at length the nobleman, as if yielding to a fit of angry impatience, ejaculated, "It is no use, Mr. Inspector: I can do no good with this fellow."

"I was afraid not, my lord," observed the officer, now returning to the threshold of the door. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, to treat his lordship in this manner."

"His lordship?" ejaculated the Burker: "how did I know he was a lord? You said fast of all he was a gentleman."

"It is no less a personage than his Grace the Duke of Marchmont," replied the Inspector ostentatiously.

"Well—a duke may do a poor devil some good," said the Burker: "so here goes! Just put your fingers, my lord, inside my waist—right underneath this cursed old gaborline; and there you'll find a little in the lining."

The Duke handing the bull's eye to the Inspector, advanced towards th

prisoner, and affected to be fumbling amongst his garments in search of the place of concealment which had been described. But it was in reality from the waistcoat pocket that he took the ring; and turning towards the Inspector, the nobleman displayed it with a look of joyous satisfaction.

"I congratulate your lordship," said the official, who was himself highly delighted with what he conceived to be the successful result of a proceeding at which he had materially assisted.

"Much as I am horrified at this man's character and crimes," said the Duke, "yet if there be any way in which I can temporarily ameliorate his condition while he is in this place——"

"There is nothing, my lord, which you can do in that respect," answered the Inspector. "He will be removed by the earliest mail train to-morrow to Liverpool: and in this cell; must he remain until the hour of departure."

"Well then, there is nothing I can do for him," observed the Duke: then turning to the Barker, he added, "Unhappy man, I hope you will repent of what you have done!"

Having thus expressed himself with a monstrous hypocrisy and dissimulation, the Duke of Marchmont issued from the cell.

"You shall have hot water almost immediately," said the Inspector, pausing for an instant ere he looked the door.

"Thank'ee," answered the Barker: "but it's too late now. I'd much rather be left to go to sleep quietly, if so be I'm to start of so thundering early in the morning."

"But you require food before you go to sleep," said the Inspector.

"Not a mouthful—and not a drain," rejoined the prisoner gruffly. "Do you think a feller has got any stomach when he is in such a precious plight as this? I wish you'd leave me to myself—undisturbed—to sleep away my bad thoughts: and then I shall thank you."

"Very well, answered the Inspector, "you shall not be disturbed."—and he then looked the huge door of the cell.

As the Duke and the official issued forth into the street again, the latter said in a servile manner, "See, my lord, what it is to have great title. If I hadn't happened to have told that fellow who your lordship is, he never would have given up the ring."

"And as I am indebted to you for so much civility and attention," responded Marchmont, "you must not feel it an insult if I proffer you some little token of my gratitude."

At the same time his lordship thrust a ten pound note into the Inspector's hand: and then hurried away, as if for the purpose of cutting short the thanks which the recipient of this bounty began of to proffer.

But let us return to the Barker. Scarcely had the door of the cell again closed upon him, when he gave a sort of bound upon his seat, as if to afford ebullition to his hitherto pent-up feelings of delight. Not only had he now in his possession a little instrument by the aid of which much might be done, and the important deed of an escape perhaps be effected: but he had likewise the assurance that the Duke of Marchmont was not abandoning him to his fate, but that he was interesting himself in him.

"So," said the Barker, thus continuing the train of his ideas, "the worst comes to the worst and I don't get out of limbo now, but find myself cast for death at Liverpool, there's a nobby cove as will stand my friend: and I shouldn't wonder if he was to bring the case of Mr. Barnes Esquire afore the House of Lords, and say as how it would be a thundering shame to put so useful a gentleman out of the way by making his neck acquainted with a thing that's only fit for a horse or a haas—a halter to wit. Ah! it's a blessed good thing to have a Duke as one's pal: for somehow or another he's sure to get me safe out of this precious mess that I'm in. And if so be I do come off scot free, I'll hunt out that sneaking, snivelling rascal, Jack Smedley; and I'll have his life as sure as his name's what it is. Perhaps I shall go across the water at the country's expense—just as our great ambassadors travels for nothing—or as them dirty scamps of German Princess does when they comes over to visit their pals at Windsor Castle or Buckingham Palace. And if I do go out in that there honourable manner to Wan Diemen's Land or Australia, so much the better for my resolve to wring that feller Jack Smedley's neck: oos why, he's certain to be lagged. And if I'm let free altogether through my friend the Duke—or if so be I escape to-night—blowed if I don't start off at my own expense—that is, at the Duke's—but it's just the same thing;

and I'll never rest till I cook Jack Smedley's goose."

The Barker sometimes had a habit of musing as well as of talking in a strain that was horribly and furiously humorous; and such was the mood that he found himself in now. A pitchy darkness prevailed in the cell; but if any eyes had been peering in upon that wretch, and if they could have penetrated the Cimmerian blackness of the place, it would have been seen that his countenance expressed a diabolic savageness while he was thus meditating his schemes of vengeance in respect to Jack Smedley.

The Barker felt the file; and by the touch he knew that it was one well suited to his purpose. He was tolerably well assured that he would not at least for the present be intruded upon, inasmuch as he reflected that whatsoever the Inspector had promised in the presence of the Duke of Marchmont, he was certain to perform. The reader can have been at no loss to comprehend the Barker's motive in declining to have hot water sent in wherewith to take off his beard, and likewise in refusing the refreshments which the Inspector had proffered. He wished to be left entirely to himself, so that with the least possible delay he might commence operations towards the achievement of his escape. It was really true, as he had stated to the constable, that he could not take off his beard without the use of hot water: for the adhesive matter clung tight to the skin, which it would assuredly peel off if it were attempted to remove the beard by violence. And then, too, it must be observed that the Barker had not been shaven for two or three days; so that the false beard had a particularly powerful hold on the natural stubbly growth over all the lower part of his face.

Not many minutes elapsed after the Duke of Marchmont and the Inspector had quitted the cell, before the prisoner—now convinced that everything was again quiet—began to file away at one of the handcuffs. The operation of severing the iron was not a very long one, although he had to work somewhat at a disadvantage from the fact that his two hands were kept by the connecting chain inconveniently close together. But when one ring was thus sundered, and that hand was free, the other manacle was more expeditiously eaten through with

the biting teeth of the file. Scarcely was this task accomplished, and just as the Barker was beginning to rub in gloefulness the hands that were thus liberated,—when he heard the door of the little yard open.

To slip his hands through the rings again—to conceal the file—to stretch himself upon the bench—and to begin to breathe with a heavy regularity as well as with a certain nasal sound,—all these were the work of a moment. But still the Barker was seized with dire alarm, lest any official should enter the dungeon to examine whether his handcuffs were all right. He heard heavy footsteps approaching; they stopped at the door of his cell; and then the trap was pushed open. The light of a bull's-eye was thrown through that trap into the cell; and it streamed full upon Barney's countenance. He affected to wake up slowly; and rubbing his eyes, growled forth, "What the devil did you do that for?—why can't you let a feller sleep?"

"I only wanted to see that you were all right," answered the constable, who was peeping through the trap.

"All right indeed!" responded the Barker, still in a growling tone. "I rayer think that I'm all wrong and so you'd fancy too, my fine feller, if you was locked up in this cursed place. Why, it took me half-an-hour to compose myself to sleep on this hard plank; and now you've woke me up, it'll take me another blessed half hour to go off again."

"I didn't mean to disturb you," answered the officer; and that's the reason that I looked through the trap instead of opening the door."

"Well, you're a considerate gentleman in your way," rejoined Barney. "I don't think as how the tax-payers of this blessed country gives you chaps twenty bob a week a piece to come walking up respectable people which is taking their natural rest. Howsomer, I forgive you for one; and so now good night."

Having thus spoken, the Barker turned round upon the hard bench again, and affected to be endeavouring to compose himself off to sleep. The constable closed the little trap-door; and immediately afterwards the Barker caught the sound of the yard-door shutting likewise. He started up from the bench; and off came the manacles again. His proceedings—at least the next proceeding which he had to adopt, was already settled in

his mind. He knew these cells of old; and he was well acquainted with the features, the arrangements, and the position of all adjacent buildings. There was no upper storey to the little structure containing the cells; the roof was immediately above his head; and in that quarter it was that he purposed—or at least hoped to be enabled to effect his escape.

The cell was tolerably high; and there was no movable furniture in it which he could use to raise himself upon or to make available as a standing place. But in this respect his plan of proceeding was also settled: he had well weighed and pondered the point when filing at his handouffs. In the first place, by the aid of the file he dislodged a brick in the wall at the height which suited his purpose and at about two feet distant from the corner or angle, then he did the same with another brick in corresponding position in the wall which united with the other one to form that angle. Working in the dark, these processes were far longer than they would have been if he had the benefit of light. His next step was to break off a portion of the wood which edged the hard plank bed, or rather seat, on which he had reposed himself when the constable looked through the trap-door. He had so well calculated the length of the piece of wood which he could thus detach, in reference to the distance between the two holes left in the walls by the extraction of the bricks that the stout fragment of timber exactly fitted into the apertures provided for its reception. The reader will therefore understand that this piece of wood formed the basis of a triangle of which the two walls were the sides and the angle of the wall was the apex: or in more simple terms, the wood was a sort of hollow shelf stretching from wall to wall, at about two feet from a corner.

Standing upon this piece of wood, the Barker was enabled to commence operations upon that part of the roof which was immediately over his head; and aided by the file, he speedily forced a hole through the lath and plaster. With his hand he could feel the tiles; and he had now to dislodge them in such a way that they should not slide down the sloping roof and fall into the road—a circumstance which might lead to the frustration of his entire project of escape. Therefore, after having raised the first

tile with the utmost caution, he drew in each successive one through the opening thus formed, and deposited it upon the floor of his cell. Though he worked with all his characteristic energy, yet was he in a continued state of suspense; for another visit on the part of a constable to the little trap in the door would prove the ruin of every thing. This visit was not however paid; and thus the Barker worked on unmolested.

At length the opening was large enough for him to begin passing himself through it; and first protruding his head, he looked carefully around to see whether the coast was clear. No one was in the little yard—no one was looking forth from any of the numerous windows which, at the backs of the adjacent houses, commanded a view of the scene. At a short distance was the rear of the vast structure of Covent Garden Theatre; and as the Barker knew that the establishment was shut up at the time, a thought struck him.

"If I could only get into that place," he said within himself, "maybe I should have a choice of dresses: and whether I made my appearance in the streets as Harlequin or Pantaloon, it would at all events be a change from this cussed old black gaberdine and grey beard."

Having satisfied himself that he was unobserved, the Barker issued completely through the aperture which he had formed in the roof of his cell; and he now seemed to breathe the air of freedom. Gathering up the folds of his long garment in such a way that it might not encumber him nor impede his progress, he crept along a wall, and climbed to the top of the somewhat higher building than that room which he had escaped. Another connecting wall brought him to another flat-roofed house; and here he came to a stand still. The place where thus found himself, abutted against a much higher building, to reach the summit of which there was only one means visible—and this was to climb a slanting leaden pipe. To do this, or to retrace his way altogether to the roof of his cell and seek some other avenue of escape amidst the maze of building,—these were the alternatives between which he had to decide. With straining eyes he penetrated through the semi-obscurity which prevailed; and he thought he beheld sufficient to convince himself that the passage of the leaden

pipe, however desperate the venture might be, was the course to be adopted.

The courage of the Barker has been before spoken of; and as his countenances were desperate, this natural courage on his part was now enhanced to a degree which rendered him almost reckless. His resolve was therefore speedily taken. Again he gathered up the old Jewish gaberdine in such a way that it might not impede his progress; and then he entrusted himself to the slanting pipe, in the same spirit of venturesome desperation with which a ship-wrecked mariner clings to the plank which is the only barrier between himself and destruction. The reader will understand that this loaden pipe sloped up from the roof where the Barker had landed, to the roof of the higher house against which the former building abutted; and it thus ran diagonally as it were, or obliquely, along the back of that loftiest structure. We may add that there was just a sufficient interval between the pipe and the brickwork to allow the adventurous fugitive to obtain a firm grasp upon it;—and now success depended upon two conditions—the first being whether he could maintain his balance, and the second whether the pipe itself would be strong enough to support him,

Firmly clutching the pipe with his hands, and cautiously using his lower limbs to sustain him in that perilous position, the Barker began crawling up the pipe: but there was a moment when his heart almost failed him as he looked down into the frightful abyss to which would be hurled if his hands failed to retain there hold, or if the pipe itself should give way. But sternly compressing his lips,—and bracing himself up with all his courage, the Barker pursued his path of danger,—suspended in mid air, and looking like some colossal insect that was crawling up the back of the house. Several yards were accomplished—when one of the dreaded chadders against him appeared about to receive a horrible realization; for the pipe began to bend. So mortal a terror seized upon the Barker, notwithstanding the daring nature of his disposition, and notwithstanding the recklessness of his character, that for an instant he felt his hands relaxing from the tightness of their grasp: but then the next moment, quick as thought, they tightened upon the pipe with even a stronger tenacity

than before—while his lower limbs grasped it convulsively.

But the pipe was bending! To retreat was impossible: there was no gliding nor sliding back from the position in which he had placed himself. On he must go at all risks and ventures:—on he must go though the next instant should see the pipe suddenly give way or break beneath him and plunge the wretch headlong into the abyss below. Fortune however determined to favour him: the pipe bent, but did not break; hope grew stronger in his breast—and it was with a wild thrill of joy that he could at length say to himself he was safe. His right hand clutched the ledge of the parapet of the high building to which he had thus venturously and desperately chambered up: a few instants more, and he stood in safety on the flat roof of that building. Almost overcome by a sense of the danger from which he had escaped, and shuddering at the recollection of the hideous gulf which by means of a frail pipe he had thus bridged, the Barker threw himself flat upon his back on the ledge to repose for a few instants ere he pursued his way. Precious though time were, yet the man could not help thus resting there for that brief space.

CHAPTER CXVI.

TWO FRIENDS.

A COUPLE of rooms on the second floor of one of the houses on the same line with the Bow Street police office, were inhabited by a middle aged man of the name of Bealby. He was a short thin active, dapper-looking person,—with hair and whiskers that had once been of a vivid red, but which were now turning grey. He had very sharp, keen, piercing eyes; and the entire expression of his countenance indicated cunning and duplicity. He was dressed in a somewhat seedy suit of black; and his linen was not altogether of the cleanest.

The two rooms communicated with folding doors, which stood open; and the place was most singularly crowded with articles which at the first glance might either be taken for an assemblage of archaeological curiosities, or else for the contents of a property-room at a theatre. There were helmets, and shields, and weapons of all sorts—curious costumes—

a Turkish turban surmounting the wooden framework on which a mandarin's robe was displayed—a Red Indian's tomahawk lying next to an old-fashioned English musket—and a whaling harpoon keeping company with a New Zealand bow and arrow. There were old pieces of china, statuettes, vases, and pictures—brickbats that were alleged to be part of a recently discovered Roman wall in some place or another—bowls and cups that were represented to have been dug out of Herculaneum and Pompeii—while a mummy in a glass case appeared to be staring with cyclopean sockets at a gigantic skeleton which grinned at it from the opposite wall. There were strange pieces of theatrical scenery too, and when a small label represented to have been used at the Royal Opera some little while back established by the King of the Sandwich Islands in his Majesty's capital;—and, in a word, the contents of these two rooms were of the most miscellaneous and no doubt of a very curious description.

By the light of a solitary candle in the front apartment, Mr. Bealby was drinking gin-and-water with a friend. This friend was many years younger than himself: indeed he was not more than five or six and twenty; but he had a sickly dissipated look, as if he were much better acquainted with the alcoholic mixture which he was now imbibing than with regular and wholesome meals. He was exceedingly shabby in his apparel; and by the state of his linen appeared to possess the confidence of his washerwoman to a much smaller degree than did even Mr. Bealby himself. This individual bore the surname of Limber; but amongst his friends and equals he was familiarly known by the diminutive of his Christian name of Benjamin.

We should observe that Mr. Bealby had been out to pass the evening at a free-and-easy, where he had partaken of a chop and a baked potato—thereby to use his own highly expressive language, knocking dinner, tea and supper, all into one. At this free and easy he had encountered Mr. Limber, who was an old acquaintance, but whom he had not seen for some few years. Remembering that he had a little credit at the public-house nearly facing his lodging in Bow Street, and that this credit was good to the extent of a bottle of gin and half a dozen cigars, Mr. Bealby invited his friend home to partake of

those refreshments—observing “that as they had a great deal to say to each other, they might just as well quaff their blue-ruin and smoke their weeds at his rooms.” Thither therefore they repaired from the fresh-and-easy: the gin and the cigars were procured from the public house aforesaid, and it happened that just at the time the Barker was engaged in climbing up the pipe, Mr. Bealby and Mr. Limber were sitting down to enjoy themselves in the apartment of the former.

Mr. Limber was prepared by some little conversation during the walk from the free-and-easy, to find his friend's rooms crammed with strange objects; and therefore on entering these apartments he was not so much astonished as he would have been if suddenly introduced thither without any previous information on the point. At the same time, being somewhat of a nervous temperament, Ben Limber liked the aspect of the mummy and the skeleton as little as possible; and he sat with his back towards those objects, while discussing the gin-and-water, the cigars, and things in general.

“Why, how long is it since you and I met, old fellow?” asked Bealby, when they had begun to make themselves comfortable.

A matter of six or seven years,” was the response. “I was just fresh upon town then—green—uncommon green!—but I've picked up a bit or two of experience since.”

“You was a lawyer's clerk then,” said Bealby.

“Yes; but I devilish soon out the law,” replied Ben Limber, “and went upon the stage. I starred it a bit in the provinces as Mr. Sidney Howard Fitzplantagenet; but I soon got tired of that sort of business—and have been knocking about the world in various ways—till, betwixt you and me and the post I am pretty near knocked down altogether.”

“Well, we must see if we can't knock you up again,” responded Bealby. “It will be a devilish hard thing if two clever chaps like you and me, can't put our heads together and do something good. You talked of your experience; but they are nothing like mine! Why, my history would make such a book as never before was read!”

"Well, what have you been doing since you and I last met?" inquired Ben Limber.

"You should rather ask what I have not been doing," rejoined the other. "I've dabbled in everything. Let me see—what was I when you saw me last?"

"You had just gone through the Insolvent's Court, you know," answered Ben Limber, with a laugh; "and you was in high feather."

"Ah, to be sure!" observed Mr. Bealby: "I was getting up an Insurance Company at that time. I'll tell you how it was. I was three months in the Queen's Bench before I went with flowing canvass through the Court; and in the Bench I met half-a-dozen capital fellows, who agreed to join with me in starting the Insurance Company. So we soon had everything ready out and dried; and we gave ourselves our respective situations. I was to be Resident Manager, with a salary of four hundred a year; another was to be Actuary; two others were to be Auditors; another was to be Vice-Chairman of the Board; and lashing blade of a fellow was to be surgeon. So the moment we all got out, we set to work and established the concern, Splendid offices—Capital, two hundred thousand pounds!"

"The deuce!" ejaculated Ben Limber with a start of astonishment. "Where did you find your capitalists?"

"In imagination," answered Mr. Bealby, with a knowing look. "We issued the shares; it was not at all difficult—nothing to do but to have so many slips of paper neatly printed. We gave two or three hundred a-piece to ourselves, and five hundred to Lord Brummagem, who on that condition became the Chairman of the Board of Directors. I can assure you the whole affairs was most splendidly managed; and for twelve months it went on swimmingly."

"You don't mean to say that you really issued any policies?" observed Mr. Limber.

"I mean to say," replied Bealby, "that we issued four or five hundred policies during those twelve months. The grand secret was that our medical examiner took every life that offered itself, no matter whether the applicant might be in the last stage of consumption."

"But when any one died?" said Mr. Limber inquiringly.

"Fraud, my dear fellow—fraud!" responded Mr. Bealby: "that was our invariable answer. The company had been imposed upon—the insurer had kept back certain facts; he had admitted that he spat blood and had a continuous hacking cough, but he had withheld the important fact that he experienced an incessant pain in his great toe. Bless you! deaths came tumbling in at a frightful rate, because we insured everybody, and we gave a percentage to our agents on every policy they brought in, so that they were interested in getting as many as possible, without the slightest reference to the value of the lives. The game would have lasted well enough, had it not been that a cursed weekly newspaper began to attack us; the bombardment was continuous and irresistible; so we fell to pieces. There was an end of the Universal Assurance Company for all Christendom."

"And what did you do next?" inquired Mr. Limber.

"I advertised an income of four pounds a week for everybody who would send me five shillings' worth of postage stamps. That was my next dodge," added Mr. Bealby, as he complacently whiffed his cigar.

"I don't quite understand it," observed his friend dubiously.

"Quite intelligible, my dear fellow!" said Mr. Bealby. "I inserted an advertisement in a newspaper offering to instruct any one who sent me five shillings' worth of postage stamps, in the way of making three or four pounds a week. On receiving the stamps, I sent half a dozen practical receipts,—one for making cheap gingerbeer—another for soda-powders—a third for pomatum—a fourth for a dentifrice—a fifth for an anti-bilious pill—a sixth for a cosmetic—and so on. Now observe! The advertisement cost me seven-and-sixpence—it brought me twenty letters containing the stamps—that was five pounds; deduct the expenses for advertisement, the little printed slips of receipts, the stationery and postage for replies—and I had at least four pounds eight to put into my own pocket."

"That was a lucrative thing," observed Ben Limber. "Why did you give it up?"

"It gave me up," answered Bealby: "it wore itself out. A number of other fellows imitated the trick: they cheapened the thing—they only asked for a

shilling's worth of stamps: and so it soon ceased to be worth while to carry on the business at all.

"Well, what did you do next?" inquired Limber.

"I opened a servants' bazaar," responded Bealby.

"But how the deuce did you make a connexion amongst servants?" exclaimed Limber.

"I never did make any. I barged half-a-crown for registering each name in my book; and, you see, it was all clear profit."

"Well, but those who paid, expected recommendations to places?"

"Yes—and they got them too. I copied and addresses of persons advertising in the morning papers for domestic; and that was the way I managed."

"But the thing could scarcely last," said Limber.

"No more it did," replied Bealby with a smile: "or else I should be carrying it on now. I was rather too fond of some of the pretty servant girls that came to pay their fees; and betwixt you and me, Ben, the concern was suddenly broken up by an unpleasant little incident which occurred."

"How so?" asked Limber.

"The fact is, I was had up before the magistrate on an accusation of trying to snatch a kiss from a certain pair of red lips: an investigation followed—the way in which the business was transacted was brought to light—and while passing a month at the House of Correction on account of the kissing affair, I had ample leisure to reflect on what should be the new dodge."

"And what did you do then?" asked Ben Limber.

"I came out of prison in such precious bad plight," responded Mr. Bealby "that I was scarcely fit for anything except to make myself a victim."

"A victim!" ejaculated Ben. "A victim of what?"

"A victim of religious persecution," answered Mr. Bealby. "Don't you see, I was a tradesman from the north of England who had been distrained upon for Church rates; and resisting the claim upon principle, was made a martyr to the cause. I had come up to London to get some Member to present a petition to Parliament on my behalf; but being reduced to distress, was obliged to apply to the sitting magistrate at one of the

police courts—taking very good care, however, not to address myself to the worshipful gentleman who had committed me in the kissing case. Well, my story was believed; I had ten shillings given me from the poor-box; and the next day the case was in all the papers. 'Respectable man'—'distressed and careworn appearance'—and all that sort of thing. It told admirably; and subscriptions poured in. 'A. B. C.' sent two pounds; 'A Lady' five pounds; 'the Earl of X' ten pounds; 'A Dissenter' one guinea; and so forth. An elderly Quaker ferreted me out and took me to his house. I received the first subscriptions from the magistrate; they still kept pouring in—but I never got any more; for his worship in the meantime had written to the north, and had learnt that my tale was a pure fabrication. The Quaker resented a little familiarity of which I was guilty towards his pretty demure-looking daughter, from whose lips I sought a kiss: and so, all things considered, I was compelled to beat a retreat into another neighbourhood."

"And what did you do then?" inquired Ben Limber.

"I could not immediately settle my mind to anything," answered Mr. Bealby; "and so the money slipped away before I was well-prepared with a scheme for making more. At last, driven by necessity, I took to penny-a-lining for a sporting newspaper. It was hard work enough; but I got a good insight into turf matters—though I did not much relish the vocation. I was thinking of giving up the newspaper—when a vacancy for Prophet suddenly occurred."

"A prophet?" ejaculated Ben Limber, his eyes staring wide with astonishment.

"Yes—to be sure!" said his friend coolly—"a Prophet at a weekly salary of two guineas. You don't twig, I see. Well then, I mean a Prophet to predict the winning horses at all forthcoming races."

"Ah, I understand!" said Ben Limber. "But how long did you keep that situation?"

"Only six months," responded Mr. Bealby: "for the truth is that in no single instance did I ever predict accurately. Not that in this respect I was in any way worse than the Prophets on other newspapers—only the proprietor of the one to which I belonged was rather particular, and he thought that a prophet ought to predict right at least

once out of twenty times. So he discharged me; and I was again thrown upon the world."

"And what did you do then," asked Ben Limber.

"I got up a Benefit Society," replied Mr. Bealby.

"A Benefit Society?" echoed his friend. "For whose benefit?"

"For my own," was the response. "It was ostensibly for the advantage of the working-classes—but in reality for mine. Every one who paid a few pence a week was to have fifteen shillings a week during illness—to be buried, when he died, with a good walking funeral, and his widow to have a ten pound note to buy mourning for herself and the children. I was Secretary, and Treasurer and Auditor, and Manager—I think I was the Committee too; but I know very well that I was the principal recipient of the Society's benefits. At last there was an exposure and an inquiry: I was summoned before the magistrate—but I had taken very good care not to have the society enrolled; and therefore his worship had no power of jurisdiction. The case was dismissed; and in order that the members should not fall into most unchristian feuds amongst themselves relative to the division of the remaining funds, I put them into my pocket;—and bidding an eternal farewell to the ungrateful neighbourhood of Whitechapel where the exposure had taken place, I established my quarters in another."

"And what was the next course?" inquired Ben.

"I never was a fellow who could work much as long as there was any ready money to spend: and so I lived comfortably until I changed my last sovereign—when I began to think of something else. So I took to the Christmas hamper dodge."

"What do you mean?" asked Ben Limber.

"Why, out of the change for my last sovereign," replied Mr. Bealby, "I paid seven and sixpence for an advertisement in the *Times*, which ran to the following effect:—'Bealby and Co., old established Wine-merchants, continue to despatch their famous Christmas hampers, but on reduced terms. To every person remitting one guinea, Bealby and Co., will forward a hamper containing one bottle of old port, one of rich brown sherry, one of old East India Madeira, one of

French brandy, one of Jamaica rum, and one of prime Hollands.'—You would be astonished at the way in which the guineas came pouring in: so I kept up the advertisements during the Christmas week; then I renewed them for the New Year's week; and when that was over, I changed the name and address, and advertised splendid twelfth-cakes on similar terms. I reaped a golden harvest, and lived comfortably upon it for the next three months. At length one morning I sallied out, wondering what I should do next, with only eighteen pence in my pocket—"

"And what did you do then?" inquired Ben Limber. "What could you possibly do with eighteen pence?"

"I went and took a theatre," was the cool reply.

"A theatre with eighteenpence!" exclaimed Limber. "Well, after all my knowledge of the world is really nothing to your's!"

"I told you so just now," said Mr. Bealby. "Yes—it is a fact—I went and took a theatre at a rental of about a thousand a year."

"But what use could you turn it to?" asked his friend.

"Underlet it the very next day to some one else; and as he paid me the rent, but as I paid none myself, it was all clear profit as long as it lasted. But the proprietor sued me—I was put into prison, and had to petition the Insolvents' Court a second time."

"I should think you got remanded for that?" observed Ben Limber interrogatively.

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Mr. Bealby. "I described myself as a Lessee—and that was sufficient. It is considered that every lessee of manager of a theatre may go through the Bankruptcy or Insolvents' Courts as often as ever they like; and they are always objects of sympathy. The Commissioner complimented me on not having had to insert the salaries of any performers in my schedule,—which was not however astonishing, as I had never employed any. However, I got off with flying colours—but with scarce a shilling in my pocket."

"And what did you do then?" inquired Mr. Benjamin Limber, who was evidently much interested in his friend's explanations.

"Why, just at that moment there was a grand festival going on in Paris: so I advertised that Mr. Bealby, the well

known manager of excursion trips, offered to take a party over to Paris, paying the first-class railway fare thither and back—lodging and boarding them for a whole week at a first-rate hotel in the French capital—and supplying every luxury for breakfast, dinner, and supper,—all included for twenty guineas a head. Well, I contracted with the railway; and I had fifty subscribers to my party. We started:—this I was obliged to do, because according to agreement I was to collect the money at Dover. And you may be very sure that I *did* collect it there: but by some extraordinary mistake I took my place in a return-train immediately afterwards; and instead of going any farther on the way to France, I found myself supping again very quietly in London that same evening."

Mr. Benjamin Limber laughed uproariously at this last *escapade* of his friend Mr. Bealby, who himself joined in the mirth.

"And what did you do next?" inquired the younger gentleman.

"I found there was such a terrible expounder in the newspapers," was the reply,—"*so many indignant letters were written—and so many unpleasant threats were promulgated about having me up before the Lord Mayor, that I deemed it expedient to take a trip into the country until the storm blew over. Unfortunately I got excessively drunk one night amongst a party of gentlemen somewhat sharper than myself; and I when awoke in the morning, I had not a single shilling left. There was a distressing position for a man of genius to be placed in? I went wandering about the country in a desperate state,—until one afternoon I reached an old deserted tile-kiln, with an accompanying works in a dismantled and ruined condition. There I found an old man peering about in every nook and corner—digging up the earth—and apparently hunting for something. I watched him awhile from a distance,—thinking that he was a treasure-seeker. At length I accosted him. He was at the outset by no means inclined to be communicative; but as I had a presentiment that the encounter would tend to my advantage, I did my best to draw him into discourse. I learnt that he was a purveyor of curiosities for one of the old shops in Wardour Street, London—and that he was hunting for old earthen vessels in Warwickshire to save himself*

the trouble of going to Herculaneum or Pompeii in Italy. There was something in this pursuit which tickled my fancy. I offered to assist him; and I soon dug him out a lot of curious-shaped vessels and broken pipkins, which sent him into raptures. He paid me liberally—gave me his address in London—and told me to call upon him. This interview gave a new impetus to my fertile fancy. I provided myself with all sorts of curiosities,—a piece of the true cross which a Cardinal had given me in Rome—a fragment of the holy coat which is preserved at Treves, and which fragment a monk whom I made tipay had sacrilegiously torn off for my special gratification—the veritable cannon ball which struck the spire of St. Stephen's at Vienna and knocked it on one side, when the Turks besieged that city—the bullet which slew Nelson at Trafalgar—the identical pen with which Napoleon signed the treaty of Amiens,—in short, I cannot enumerate the curiosities, ancient and modern, with which I provided myself while on my journey to London. Then, on arriving there, instead of calling on the old purveyor whom I had encountered at the tile-kiln, I went straight to the shop in Wardour Street, which he had happened to name to me; and I disposed of all my curiosities. But I was terribly disappointed at the pettiness of the price which I obtained for them. I really thought that I was playing an excellent game with the credulity of the curiosity-dealer,—until on grumbling at his term he gave me to understand it was the *idea* he was paying for, and not the thing themselves—for those he knew to be all humbugs. Then I laughed likewise—and the end of it all was he offered me a regular engagement. I remained with him for about six months, helping him with the ingenuity of my original ideas and becoming intimated in many of the mysteries of his craft. He taught me, for instance, how to get up old pictures: and I learnt that he constantly employed six artists to paint him originals of Rubens, Vandyke, Titian, Grouze—"

"Originals?" ejaculated Ben Limber:

"Why, of course;—weren't they to be sold as *originals*?" demanded Mr. Bealby, somewhat indignantly: "And then too, my friend the curiosity-dealer taught me how to make mummies—"

"Make mummies?" cried Ben Limber, again in astonishment.

"Yes—to be sure!" exclaimed Mr. Bealby. "I myself got up a couple of mummies in so artistic a manner that a member of the Archaeological Society proved in a neat and interesting speech of about six hours' duration, that they were at least four thousand years old; and there was not a dissentiment from this opinion. You see that mummy there, in the glass case? I can assure you it was not in existence four months back; and this morning a gentleman belonging to that very Society, and who is considered to be one of its brightest ornaments—although he is deaf and half-blind—was thoroughly convinced that it is the oldest mummy ever brought into this country. He is to bring me twenty pounds for it to-morrow: but the worst of it Ben," added Mr. Bealby, lowering his voice somewhat, "is that I owe fifteen pounds to my landlady; and she will take very good care to receive the money from the old archaeologist, or else she won't let that blessed mummy go out of the place."

"How long did you stay with your curiosity dealer?" asked Ben Limber: "or perhaps I ought rather to have inquired why you left him?"

"Why, you see, the public curiosity is variable. To-day it's an old picture—to-morrow Tom Thumb: to-day some rubbish from Herculaneum—to-morrow the Bosjesmans Well, just at that time the discovery of the Californian gold regions was making a tremendous sensation: so I had some thundering large pieces of granite carefully gilt, and I exhibited them as nuggets. They were in a glass case, and protected by a row of iron bars. I advertised that they were worth seventy thousand pounds; and all the town came to see them. At length one of the workmen who had helped to glide the granite, came to the exhibition one Monday morning; and as he was the worse for liquor to the extent of some three or four pots of beer, he let out the whole secret. I decamped—but with about eight hundred pounds in my pocket—the fruit of fortnight's industry in displaying my nuggets. And would you believe it, Ben?—I fell a second time amongst thieves, and was plundered of my all!"

"Light come, light go," said Mr. Limber, laughing.

It was no laughing matter for served Mr. Bealby: "and I was

obliged to take to something else. Some little speculation which I need not dwell upon—it was merely the exhibition of a sea-serpent, being three conger-eels curiously joined together—produced me fifty guineas; and then I resolved to turn curiosity-maker on my own account. I took these rooms. I applied myself assiduously to work—I invested my little capital—and now what I have got my stock-in-trade all in readiness, there comes a lull in the curiosity market—things are flat—skeletons are below par—old armour is at a discount—there is no briskness in Roman brickbats—vessels from Herculaneum are dull—and nothing but that mummy appears to be looking up."

"As pleasant a series of adventures as ever one could wish to hear," said Ben Limber. "You are poor—and I am poorer still: you will have five pounds to-morrow for yourself out of the twenty—I have not got five pence, and no chance of getting them either."

"Never mind, my boy," said Mr. Bealby: "we shall be able to do something together. There's always a fine opening for men of enterprise and talent in this great metropolis. And I tell you what, Ben," added the archaeological gentleman, in a tone of confidence—which was accompanied by a look rendered all the more mysterious by the influence of the alcoholic liquor—"two chaps could work an oracle much better than one. I have often felt the want of a clever partner, or assistant. Lord bless you! if I had only possessed such an auxiliary as yourself, I should have invented and exhibited the perpetual motion long ago. But then where the devil was I to get a trustworthy fellow to turn the crank in the cellar?"

"True!" said Mr. Limber: "there are no doubt many things which two can do together, but which can't be accomplished by one."

"I have got hold of a capital idea," said Mr. Bealby: "but it wants a little cash to start it—some twenty or thirty pounds or so."

"Sell off the whole of this trumpery and raise the coin," suggested Mr. Limber.

"My dear fellow," responded his edifying friend Mr. Bealby, "you require to be enlightened on this point. These things are not worth eighteen-pence, unless somebody takes a fancy to them. Look at their intrinsic value: it

is nothing! Send them to an auction, or sell in a lot of brokers—and to what ignominious nothingness do all my beautiful curiosities reduced! A brickbat is then simply a brickbat: this corsalet, which I declare to have been worn by Sir William Wallace at the battle of Falkirk, turns out to be a Horse Guard's rusty breastplate, worth a few pence an old iron: that piece of pottery with the handle broken off, and with the letters T. I. scratched upon it—which I, speaking archaeologically, pronounce to be an ancient Roman vessel of the time of the Emperor Tiberius—the initials standing for *Tiberius Imperator*,—that piece of pottery, I say, dwindles down in a moment to a base pipkin in which some archin of modern times has confectioned hardbake or Everton tiffin. So it is, my dear fellow, with the best part of these archaeological marvels—with all the quaint dresses and curious costumes: or at all events auctioneers and brokers are such Goths and Vandals as to be utterly indifferent to the value with which antiquity stamps them. In a word, Ben, barring the mummy which is good as gold, I don't think my whole collection, if sent to the hammer, would fetch ten shillings."

"Why not invite a number of your archaeological friends to inspect the museum," asked Mr. Limber, "and tell them that you want to sell off in order to make a voyage round the world—or take a descent into Vesuvius—or to plunge into the Maelstrom to see what causes the whirlpool——"

"All this is ingenious enough Ben," interrupted Mr. Bealby: "and I honour you for the inventive genius you have just displayed. But the trick will not take. I told you just now that the curiosity market is as dull as ditch-water—skeletons are stagnant—armour is heavy—and there is no use in trying to create a sensation on behalf of Roman pottery."

"Then how is the money to be raised?" demanded Ben Limber: "for if this new idea of your's is such a good one—— But, I say, we have got to the bottom of the bottle! and there isn't a weed left!"

"My credit is good for a fresh supply if both," answered Mr. Bealby; "and as we are combining business with pleasure, we may as well keep up the discourse an hour or two longer. I will just run over the way——"

"I rather think I will accompany you," said Ben Limber, glancing somewhat shudderingly around towards the skeleton and the mummy. "I don't exactly like companionship."

Mr. Bealby burst out laughing; and rising from his seat, he said, "Come along, Ben: I've got a latch-key, and we can let ourselves out and in."

"Holloa! what was that?" asked Ben Limber, turning somewhat pale as he glanced towards the door.

"I heard nothing," responded Bealby. "What did you fancy it to be?"

"Only some strange noise. I say, who lodges overhead?"

"The landlady and the servant," replied Bealby: "but they have been in bed a long time, and are by no means likely to listen. However we shall soon see."

Thus speaking, he opened the door, and paused for a few moments on the threshold: but all was still.

"Come along Ben," he said, in a whispering tone so as not to disturb the landlady. "We shan't be many minutes in obtaining a fresh supply; and then we can make a regular night of it."

The two friends accordingly stole gently down stairs: but at the same time footstep were still more silently descending from the upper storoy; and the Barker made his way into the museum of curiosities. He had penetrated through an occupied attic into the house; and he had been listening at the door to all the latter part of Mr. Bealby's discourse. It was his temporarily retreating footstep which had alarmed Ben Limber.

The Barker had heard sufficient to inspire him with the hope that the museum would furnish him with some disguise: and now that the coast was clear, he had taken the liberty of penetrating into Mr. Bealby's archaeological sanctuary. Closing the door, he was advancing into the midst of the encumbering assemblage of goods,—when he was suddenly startled by the appearance of the colossal skeleton. Seized with dismay, the Barker sank down upon the seat which Mr. Bealby had recently occupied: but it was only for an instant that the Barker's consternation lasted. He was not the man to be long overpowered by such a spectacle; and starting up, he muttered to himself "By jingo! I ought to be more afraid of the livin' than of the dead!"

He looked around him in search of some suitable disguise; but he was bewildered by the variety of the articles which met his view, and the confusion in which they were amassed pell-mell. He knew not what course to adopt. To steal out of the house, dressed as he was, would be to risk immediate capture: for it was into Bow Street that he would have to pass. Every instant was precious; Bealby and his friend would be quickly returning. Even if he flung on some disguise selected from the choice around him, he might encounter them on the stairs—or at the door—or perhaps in the street itself; and the archaeologist would raise a hue and cry at the appearance of his own property thus making its escape on the person of a stranger. The position was most critical: but a thought struck the Barker.

"These chaps are as precious a pair of rogues as ever one would wish to meet," he said to himself; and then, hastily drawing from his pocket the bank-notes given him by Marchmont, he counted them over. "Ninety pounds!" he musingly ejaculated; "and these fellows want a matter of twenty or thirty. By jingo, it's my only chance!"

Scarcely had he arrived at this conclusion, when he heard the front door open and shut; and he at once slipped behind the mandarin's robe, which was stretched upon the wooden frame in the same way that gentleman's morning-gowns are displayed at the doors of haberdasher's shops.

Almost immediately afterwards Bealby and his friend Ben Limber re-entered the room, with a fresh supply of liquor and cigars. It would seem that during their absence some farther conversation on business-matters must have taken place: for as Ben Limber threw himself down upon his seat, he ejaculated, "Pon my soul, Bealby, this new idea of your's is a capital one! What a terrible nuisance it would be if any one else should take it up——"

"A precious nuisance!" observed Bealby; "and just for the want of about thirty pounds or so! I wish I knew how to get the mummy out of the place without the landlady's knowledge; but it is impossible. She has got the eyes of a lynx; and what's more, when she dunned me for her rent this afternoon, I told her that the old gentleman would come to buy the mummy—and she was satisfied with my promise and that she should

receive the cash with her own fair hands."

"It is uncommon provoking!" said Ben Limber, in a tone of annoyance.

"Provoking? I believe you!" rejoined Bealby. "There's thousands to be made by that idea of mine. I would give any thing to get hold of a clear thirty-pound note at this moment—so that we might start fair and unshackled; but where the deuce such a sum is to be got by any thing like honest means, I don't know."

"Well, I say, Bealby," observed Mr. Limber, after a few minutes' pause, during which the process of drinking and smoking went on,—“suppose there was any way of raising this money *without* the strictest regard for what the world calls honesty,—what should you say? Mind—I have no settled plan—I'm only just thinking whether we ought to be over nice and particular——"

"Nice and particular indeed!" ejaculated Bealby with contempt; "Nothing of the sort! You know enough of me, and you've heard enough to-night, Ben, to be pretty well aware that I shouldn't stick at a trifle: but at the same time, my boy, I try to steer clear of the law as well as I possibly can. Nice and particular indeed! Just to show you how nice and particular I am, I shouldn't mind accepting a loan from that murderer-fellow who was examined this afternoon at the office a few doors off."

"Which means," observed Mr. Limber approvingly, "that you don't mind where the deuce the money comes, so long as it *does* come somehow or another."

"You've just it, Ben," answered Mr. Bealby.

"Well, then, gentlemen," a voice was suddenly heard to say, "I think as how I can accommodate you."

It would be impossible to describe the alarm which suddenly seized upon Mr. Bealby and Mr. Limber, as this strange, coarse, uncouth voice met their ears. But with the archaeological gentleman this terror was transient enough—whereas with his more timid friend it assumed a most ludicrous aspect. With a ghastly pale countenance, and quivering in every limb, he looked towards the skeleton: thence his affrighted glances travelled to the mummy; and he knew not from which the voice proceeded, though he was firmly impressed with the conviction that from one or the other of those sources did it emanate.

Mr. Bealby started up to see what the truth might really be, and what intruder had found his way into his museum,—when the Barker, thinking that the lapse of nearly half a minute was sufficient to prepare the gentlemen for his appearance, slowly emerged from his hiding place.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded Mr. Bealby, not exactly perceiving sufficient of the individuals a appearance to make him suspect who he might possibly be: for there was but one candle in the room, and this was burning dimly.

"Yes—who the devil are you?" echoed Mr. Limber, snatching up a tomahawk with one hand and a Roman pipkin in the other.

"I am a chap as can let you gentlemen have the little matter of thirty pound which you seems to stand in need of?"—and as the Barker spoke, he advanced nearer towards the table.

"A Jew!" ejaculated Bealby. "And yet he is not a Jew!—Ah!" and a sudden suspicion flashed to his mind.

"A Jew—and not a Jew?" echoed Mr. Limber, at the same time smitten with the same thought: and then he shuddered, and his teeth chattered, at the idea that he found himself in the presence of the terrible Barney the Barker.

"Now, gentlemen, just keep your tongues quiet," said the Barker; "and it will be all the better for you as well as for me. I'm just what you take me for: but here's the thirty pound you say you want and that you don't care a rap whence it comes from. I return for this what I require is your assistance to help me to escape."

Limber sank with a hollow moan upon a chair, the tomahawk dropping from his hand on one side, the Roman pipkin on the other. He looked aghast. But Bealby was by no means affected in the same sense; and he hastened to say, "Don't be a fool, Limber. What is it to us who this fellow is? There's the blunt—and that's all we care for. Come, Ben," he added, going straight up to his friend and clutching him by the wrist. "don't be a fool, I say! He can't eat us—he doesn't want to do us any harm; and if he did, we are two to one."

These words, hurriedly and whisperingly spoken, produced a speedy effect upon Ben Limber: they inspired him with courage—for a coward invariably derives a reassuring sensation

from the fortitude displayed by a braver companion. Starting up to his feet he exclaimed, "Well, what can we do?"

"You have escaped, I suppose said Bealby, turning quickly towards the Barker. "But how did you get in here?"

"I've broke out of the cell—I climbed up a pipe—I got to the roof of this house—I crept in at the attic——"

"Ah! the noise just now upon the stairs!" ejaculated Limber.

"To be sure!" rejoined the Barker; "that was me. I didn't know how to get out of the house; I was afraid of venturing into the street, cos why it's infested by them 'ere vaggabones of blue bottles. So I listened at your door—I heard good deal of what you was saying to each other—I found you was the right sort of chaps to help a poor devil in a difficulty—I bided my time—you went out to get more lush—and then——But, by your leave, talking of lush——"

And the Barker, pouring a quantity of gin into a tumbler, drank it off at a draught,—his eyes sorely watering, so accustomed was he to the potent alcoholic fluid.

"How can we get the man out?" asked Limber of his friend.

"How long ago was it you escaped from your cell?" demanded Bealby quickly.

"A matter of three quarters of an hour," responded the Barker; "and there's every minute a chance of the discovery being made. If so, as for going out into the street unless unkimmon well disguised——But fust of all give us some hot water to get off this cussed beard."

"Yea, at once!" answered Bealby. "Now I tell you what must be done. Ben my boy, stick your cigar in your mouth—go and saunter down the street towards the police-office and the station—see if there's anything strange going on——But stop one moment!"

Mr. Bealby rushed to the window—drew aside the blinds and looked through the panes.

"All seems quiet," he continued, returning from the window; "but we had better make sure. You go, Ben, as I have just said, and keep out for twenty minutes or so—that is to say, supposing you see nothing in the meantime that looks suspicious. But if there is, then come back directly and tell us."

Mr. Limber accordingly lighted his cigar—stuck his hat upon his head with a jaunty, rakish, independent air—and flourishing his short cane (of the true gentish description) was about to issue from the room when the Barker suddenly placed his back against the door, saying in his gruff voice, "This is all very well; but how the deuce do I know what's the true meaning of the move?"

"I understand you," observed Mr. Bealby, now assuming a decisive look and tone. "You think we mean to betray you. Very well—take up your bank-notes and be off."

"Come, come," said the Barker, "it wasn't 'andsome on my part—I must confess it wasn't."

"You know," rejoined Bealby, "that if we choose to open this window and raise an alarm, your capture would be certain."

"Beg pardon, gentlemen, for my rudeness," said the Barker; "but hope no offence. Here's the door, sir!"—and he opened it to afford egress to Mr. Benjamin Limber.

"Now drink," said Bealby, "and refresh yourself while I go down stairs and see if there's any hot water in the boiler. I know there generally is."

Mr. Barnes sat down and helped himself to some more spirits,—at the same time saying to himself, "Well blow me if all this isn't a rum tissue of adventures; but luck seems to be a-favouring of me—and I 'spose I shall get safe and sound through 'em."

In about a couple of minutes Bealby reappeared, with a pitcher of warm water; and he then conducted the Barker into a little dressing room opening from the inner apartment. The criminal soon disencumbered himself of the beard and the rest of the false hair that was upon his face; and he felt himself considerably refreshed.

"Now, sir, what's the next move?" he asked, as he emerged from the dressing-room.

"You say you've climbed up the pipe and got to the roof of this house," asked Bealby. "Do you think there are any traces——"

"Yes—the pipe's all bended down," responded the Barker.

"Then take off that old black gaberdine and give it to me," said Bealby quickly.

The Barker, perceiving that his new friend had all his wits about him, unhesitatingly complied with his demand. Bealby took from amongst his miscellaneous stores a quantity of very old but very strong silken cord; and throwing the Barker's gaberdine over his arm, he crept up-stairs, having previously taken off his shoes so that he might proceed thus stealthily and avoid disturbing the landlady and her servant. He passed out of the attic window; and peeping over the parapet, looked to see whether all was quiet in the neighbourhood of the cells attached to the police office. Satisfied of this point, Mr. Bealby crept on to the leads of the next house, and deposited the gaberdine there. He then tied one end of the silken cord round a chimney, and flung the rest over the back part of the house, so that it hung down into the yard attached thereto. Having done this—which was all the work of but three or four minutes—he retraced his stealthy way to his own apartments. There he explained to the Barker what he had done,—adding, "And now I think the police, when they discover your escape will be thrown completely off the scent."

"Well, blow me," said the Barker, "if arter myself you ain't one of the cleverest chaps in the whole world! But what's the next move?"

"Ah! now we must hold a consultation," responded Bealby; "and we have leisure to do so. The trick I have just played will afford it us; because whenever the hounds pursue, the scent is broken—or I ought to say, turned into the wrong channel. It will never be suspected you are here. You see I am doing everything I can to make thing right for you; and these bank-notes," added Bealby, now taking them up from the table, "are well earned."

"So they be," said the Barker. "You're an excellent sort of chap; and there's another ten pun' note to add to t'others;" then as he produced the additional recompense, he thought to himself off: my worry partikler and intimate friend the Duke of Marchmont must dub up for it all."

"I was just thinking," said Bealby, "whether I could not give you some such disguise that you might be able to get out of the house at once—but here's Ben Limber returning!"

Mr. Limber had taken the latch-key with him; and he was therefore enabled to let himself in. He quickly made his appearance in the room; and his countenance indicated that he had intelligence of importance to communicate.

"The shindy's began," he hastily said the instant he had closed the door of the apartment. "There's a running to and fro betwixt the police office and the station; and I heard one of the constables say in consternation 'He has escaped!'"

"Then it is out of the question," said Bealby, addressing himself to the Barker, "for you to think of leaving this house to-night. There will be a strict watch throughout the entire neighbourhood——"

"But how shall I be better off to-morrow," demanded Barney, "than I am to-night?"

"It is very certain you will not be worse off," rejoined Bealby; "and it will be very strange if we cannot think of some contrivance for your escape. Won't it be strange Ben?"

"I should rather think it would," ejaculated Mr. Limber. "And yet I don't very well see how——"

"Well, I see everything!" cried Bealby as an idea struck him: but what this idea was, we need not immediately explain:—It will transpire presently.

Meanwhile the escape of the Barker had been discovered: Ben Limber's information in this respect was perfectly accurate. A constable had visited the cell,—first of all, however, only opening the little trap-door, and throwing the light of his bull's-eye inside. But his astonishment and consternation, on perceiving that the prisoner had vanished, may be more easily imagined than described. To raise an alarm was his first proceeding: then on being joined by two or three other constables, he opened the door of the cell, and the truth became apparent: the mode of the Barker's escape was at once evident. The Inspector was speedily fetched from the station on the opposite side of the street; and a search throughout the neighbourhood was ordered. Constables were despatched in every direction, while the Inspector, with some of the most intelligent of his acolytes, lost no time in surveying the premises in the neighbourhood of the cells. Ladders were procured: they ascended to the roofs of the adjacent houses—the bent pipe was

observed—and though the officers could scarcely persuade themselves that they had thus discovered the track taken by the Barker, yet they failed not to act upon the suggestion which it might seem to afford. By means of the ladders they quickly reached the top of the house to which that bent pipe led up, and beneath the roof of which the Barker was actually at the very moment concealed. But it was on the roof of the adjacent house that the old Jewish gaberdine was discovered; and then the Inspector exclaimed, "By heaven! after all the fellow did climb up that pipe!"

Next the cord was found: and natural conclusion was that it formed another link in the clue which the officers had obtained to the track taken by the Barker.

"You see," said the Inspector, "there was that flat-roofed building betwixt the cells and those yards down below, which prevented the scoundrel from getting into them at once: so he had to climp first of all up to the roofs of these houses here, and then let himself down by this cord into the yard below. But it is no use our remaining here to chatter. Down the ladders again! over all those walls and we may catch him yet!"

The descent was quickly made. One of the constables, speeding back to the police-court, gave orders for several officers to institute a special watch in Hart Street, which was the quarter where it was supposed the Barker would endeavour to find a means of making his exit. The Inspector, and the constables who remained with him, proceeded to examine all the premises in the rear of Covent Garden Theatre, with the hope of finding some fresh trace of the prisoner—but we need hardly say without any result.

We did not interrupt the thread of those explanations to state, as we must now do, that the occupants of the highest rooms of the houses to the roofs of which the constables ascended, were considerably alarmed—many indeed being startled from their slumber, by the heavy trampling of feet overhead as well as by the sounds of voices. At first there was an idea of fire; and attic-windows were thrown open in consternation and dismay: but the constables speedily reassured the frightened ones and made them acquainted with the reason of so much disturbance. Amongst the terrified persons to whom we have

just alluded, were the landlady and the servant of the house in which Mr. Bealby dwelt: but on receiving the intelligence that there was no alarm of fire, and that the constables were merely in pursuit of a prisoner who had escaped, they retired to their respective couches again. We may add that the drawing-room storey of that house—namely, the floor just under Mr. Bealby's apartments—was unoccupied at the time: the ground-floor consisted of offices where no person remained at night; and thus, besides the landlady and her servant, there was nobody within the walls of the dwelling to be disturbed by the proceedings of the police.

It was now certain that the whole neighbourhood was closely watched by constables: and it was therefore impossible for the Burkér to attempt an escape. It became absolutely necessary for him to remain in Bealby's apartments till the morning—when the idea which the archæological gentleman had already formed to effect his safe issue, might be carried out. Mr. Limber was anxious to get away and seek his bed in an attic which he occupied in some neighbourhood a couple of miles off: but Bealby would not let him depart.

"Deuce a bit, Ben!" he said, in a hurried whisper to his friend: "you and I must remain together until this fellow is safe out of the house. Though I am not afraid of him as long as I am awake, I don't choose to stand the chance of falling off to sleep if left alone with him. We will drink and smoke till morning, Ben."

Mr. Bealby had found the opportunity of whispering these few hasty words while the Burkér was paying his respects to a half quartern loaf and one-third of a Dutch cheese which had been set before him; and has many hours had elapsed since food passed his lips, it was with a terrific appetite that he now consumed the only fare which the archæological gentleman's larder (or rather cupboard) afforded.

"Now," said Bealby, when Barnes had finished his meal and had washed it down with a copious draught of gin-and-water, "you can step into that back room, stretch yourself on the sofa, and take a good nap. My friend and I purpose to sit up for the rest of the night. There is every reason to believe that you are safe; and in the morning we will

carry out the idea which I just now described."

The Burkér, who had now every possible reason to put implicit faith in Mr. Bealby and Ben Limber, withdrew to the sofa—or rather the old sofa bedstead to which he was directed in the adjoining room: while the two friends sat drinking and smoking in the front apartment.

CHAPTER CXVII.

THE MUMMY'S OASE.

It was about seven o'clock when the Burkér awoke from a deep uninterrupted slumber of several hours; and he found his host and Ben Limber performing their ablutions in the dressing room. These two individuals neither felt nor looked any the better for having sat up drinking and smoking the entire night: but the contact of cold water refreshed them somewhat. The hour was approaching when the servant girl of the house would enter to spread Mr. Bealby's breakfast-table: and he could not possibly devise any excuse to prevent her from thus coming in—or at least it was deemed advisable to avoid everything that might tend to excite suspicion.

"The girl may take it into her head to do out the dressing-room while we are getting breakfast," said Bealby: "or to sweep out the inner-room—or a dozen different things. We must dispose of you, somehow or another," he added, turning towards the Burkér.

"Any way you like, so as you doesn't give me over to the police, or manage matters so bad that you got me took again."

"Don't be afraid," answered Bealby. "Here, get some food at once—eat and drink. Now, Ben, you just stroll out as if to look at the flowers in Covent Garden Market before breakfast; you can hear what is being said about last night's business—you can buy a newspaper too; and if you come back in about ten minutes our breakfast will be ready, and I shall have disposed of the Burkér by some means or another."

"All right," responded Ben Limber: and he issued from the apartment.

"Now you know the idea which I explained last night," said Bealby, addressing himself to the Burkér, who was devouring bread and cheese,

"About that queer-looking object which seems like a man that had been dried with the sun until he turned into leather? Well," asked the Barker, "I recollect perfectly that the idea was a good 'un."

"In five words I will explain it over again," interjected Mr. Bealby. "My landlady knows that the mummy is going away this morning; so she won't be surprised to see the large case sent out of the house. You must get into that case with the least possible delay; and when Ben Lumber comes back and says that things are all right—I mean that no sort of suspicion attaches itself to this place——"

"Dance a bit!—there's no suspicion!" said the Barker; "or else the police would be precious soon down upon us. But you was going to say what was to be done when that friend of yours comes back."

"He shall get a cart to put the case in; that case will contain you, my man; and then you can be conveyed out of London. That is all I can do for you; and I suppose that whenever you are free in the open country——"

"You can leave me to shift for myself," interjected the Barker, "But there's just one thing I should like to know: and this is——"

"I think I understand what you mean," said Bealby; "there will be a driver to the cart, and you do not see how he is to be managed? Leave this to me. I shall go with him to pretend to show him the way, and also to see that the mummy is carefully delivered. Don't be under any apprehension as to the result."

"Not I indeed," exclaimed the Barker, "now that I know you are going with the cart."

"Let us get to work," said Bealby, "before the servant-girl comes in. You have done eating and drinking?"

The Barker answered in the affirmative. The mummy was taken out of the case and deposited in a trunk, where it was looked up. The case—which indeed was an old coffin, and of solid materials, but having a glass door instead of a lid—was now laid flat upon the floor; and Bealby bade the Barker enter it.

"But I shall want a bit of a disguise," said Barney; "for it's no use turning me adrift only half-togged as I am. I should dance soon be nabbed by the police."

"I had not forgotten all this," replied Mr. Bealby; "but I meant to take a disguise with me, so that you might put it on when emerging from the case. I thought it would make you too big to lie down in that box."

Well, what is it?" asked the Barker, sweeping his looks around upon the various articles aggregated in that museum.

"What do you say to dressing yourself up as a poor Lascar sailor?" inquired Mr. Bealby. "Here's a costume—I have a dye for your flesh—a dye also for your hair—and a thick black moustache. And then too, a Lascar's disguise has this advantage—that you may pretend to be dumb if you like, or else not to understand the English language; so you won't be compelled to speak to a single soul that you may happen to encounter. If you don't like that disguise, I can dress you up as the old Norwood Gipsy——"

"What! as a o'man?" exclaimed the Barker, "No, no—none of that 'oro!'"

"Hush! not so loud! We must not be heard talking in this room; because I am supposed to be alone here."

"Well, I decide upon the Rasool sailor," said the Barker.

"The Lascar sailor, you mean," observed Bealby, with a smile.

"I des-day it's all the same—Lascar or Rasool," responded the Barker. "I think I'd rayther put on the disguise at once: I'm pretty sure as how I can stuff myself into that there box; and it will save a world of trouble when we get to the place where you mean to let me out."

"Good!" ejaculated Mr. Bealby, "Make haste and apparel yourself. Here! let me assist at the toilet: it will only be the work of a few minutes."

The archaeological gentleman speedily produced a bottle of dye for the complexion, and which figured in the catalogue of his curiosities as an extraordinary liquid which some newly discovered tribe of Central South America were accustomed to use for staining their skins. He next produced a hair dye which also had its appropriate legend was about as true as the one attached to the first-mentioned pigment. These two dyes were speedily used with such effect that the Barker's appearance underwent a complete transformation, which rendered all the more perfect by

jetty moustache, artistically affixed, and concealing the defect in the miscreant's upper lip. The lasciv garb was assumed; and Mr. Barnes felt himself to be a new man.

Benjamin Limber now returned, with a morning newspaper, in which there was a paragraph of only a few lines in respect to the Barker's escape; for the lateness of the hour at which it had occurred, prevented the penny-a-liner who reported it from entering more elaborately into detail. It recorded the bare fact,—with the addition that in spite of all the efforts of the police the miscreant had not been discovered up to the hour when that paragraph was written—namely, at about one o'clock in the morning.

"Everybody is talking of it in Covent Garden Market," observed Ben Limber; "and the general impression is that you, my man, must have managed to get safe out of London. One thing is very certain—the police are altogether off the scent for telegraphic message have been despatched along all the lines, and three or four detectives have gone off in different directions. This is what I heard in Covent Garden; and so you see your continued presence in the neighbourhood of the scene of your exploit is not suspected."

"All this is most favourable," observed Bealby. "And now, my man, into the box with you, if you can stuff yourself in!"

The glass front opened like a door, or lid; Bealby raised it—and the Barker, assisted by Ben Limber, laid himself down in the coffin-like case. He completely filled it; and he growlingly muttered something about "having his limbs precious well cramped before he got out of that cursed box again."

"At all events it is better than dancing upon nothing," observed Ben Limber.

Mr. Bealby broke out a small fragment of the glass in one corner of the lid, for the purpose of letting in the fresh air; then the lid was closed and securely latched. A quantity of old rusty green baize was spread upon the floor; and while Ben Limber raised the head of the coffin-like box, Mr. Bealby proceeded to warp the stuff round the case so that it covered the glass lid. A quantity of twine was wound round and round the coffin, in order to keep the baize in the

position in which it was folded; and thus far the work was complete.

"Now," said Bealby, "the girl shall lay the breakfast table; and I will go and settle with the landlady—or else I know very well she will not let the case go out of the house."

"But you will be parting with fifteen pounds?" whispered Ben Limber, with an air of discontent.

"I am certain to sell the mummy for twenty pounds to-day," responded Bealby; "and therefore in any case I must pay the old woman her rent. Besides, I have forty pounds in my pocket; and when I have settled the rent we shall still have twenty-five left. That fellow has got money," added Bealby, drawing his friend Limber apart; "and I must get some more out of him when the moment of liberation comes."

There was now a knock at the room door; and the servant-girl of the house made her appearance.

"That's right—lay the breakfast, Mary," said Mr. Bealby; "and be quick about it—for I've got to go out on business almost directly. There's the mummy to be taken to old Mr. Fossilton's house—"

"Beg your parding, sir," said a shrill voice of command coming from the passage outside; but nothing leaves this house until my rent's paid. You know the agreement of yesterday, sir," continued the landlady—for she was the speaker; and she now pushed her way past the servant-girl into the room: "I am to receive the money when Mr. Fossilton comes—leastways, fifteen pounds of it, for rent and things which is due—"

"Softly, softly, my good woman!" said Mr. Bealby assuming an air of dignity; "you must not treat people as if they were all a pack of swindlers."

"Swindlers, forsooth!" cried the landlady, who possessed a very vixenish countenance, and the short tip of whose nose, habitually red with drinking, was now still more inflamed with passion. "I don't like to use a harsh term, sir—but you yourself said it. I suppose now you are going to try and chouse me out of my rent, and to smuggle that ther' mummy out of the house?—Well, bless me, Mary! if it isn't packed up a ready!"—and it was with a perfect scream of rage that the landlady vociferated these words.

"Don't be foolish," exclaimed Bealby: "here is your money!"—at the same time he produced the bundle of bank-notes which he had received from the Barker. "My friend Mr. Limber brought me last night a remittance that I had been expecting; but as you, my good woman, had gone to bed I did not choose to disturb you."

"Oh! dear me, sir, it is not of the slightest consequence," said the landlady, her entire manner changing from enraged insolence to cringing servility. "I hope I have given no offence. 'I knew the rent was safe—I always said so to you, Mary—didn't I?'"

"Yes, ma'am, to be sure," responded the servant-girl, readily corroborating her mistress's falsehood.

"And I'm sure," continued the landlady, "if I did press you for the rent, it was only because my landlord is so very hard upon me——"

"Well, well," interrupted Bealby, who was impatient to finish the scene: "there's your money—you can give me the receipt presently, I say, Limber, by the bye,"—and he turned towards his friend—"would you mind stopping round into Covent Garden while Mary is getting breakfast ready and just see if you can hire a cart—a light one, with springs, you know, to convey the mummy to Mr. Fossilton's house."

"To be sure," responded Limber; and off he set.

The landlady gathered up the bank-notes which Bealby had thrown down upon the table; and with three or four curtsies she issued from the room—promising to fetch the receipt as soon as possible. Mary continued her preparations for the breakfast; and thus far thing and progressed comfortably enough. The rent was settled—there could be no possible impediment to the removal of the case—and Bealby had purposely directed Limber, in the presence of the landlady, to go and fetch a cart, so that he might have the appearance of acting in a perfectly straightforward manner, without being anxious to conceal anything. But scarcely had the landlady got down stairs when a double knock at the front door caused her to hasten and answer the summons.

It was an old gentleman of past sixty, to whom she gave admittance. He was tall and thin—dressed in black—and stooping slightly. He wore green glasses of the description called shades, as if for

weak eyes or bad sight. He walked with a cane; he took a great deal of snuff—and not in a very cleanly manner, as his shirt-frill indicated. His face was very thin and very much wrinkled; his features were sharp; and he had a habit of puckering up his lips as he looked steadfastly at any object. This was Mr. Fossilton—a man of deep learning in everything connected with archaeology, and of profound ignorance in everything that related to all other matters. He had written elaborate works upon subjects which scarcely interested fifty people in the whole country, but which he fancied had an interest for the entire world. He could make a speech of three hours' duration on an old pipkin dug out—or represented to have been dug out of Herulanum; but he could scarcely say three words on any topic which people generally choose to converse upon. His house was full of curiosities,—or what he believed to be curiosities: he had spent nearly his whole fortune on things which he prized as being of inestimable value, but for the collection of which no plodding matter-of-fact person would have given him eightpence. Photography, the steam-engine, the railway, the electric telegraph, and all the brilliant discoveries or inventions of modern science, were with him as nothing in comparison with broken old china, bits of Roman cement, and other antique relics. He considered it of far greater importance to the world to find a clue to the reading of Egyptian hieroglyphics, than to contribute in the slightest degree to the progress of modern intelligence. Such was Mr. Fossilton—the type of that class who prefer groping their way through the darkness of the tombs and sepulchres in which antiquity lies buried, than to bask in the light of the knowledge of the nineteenth century.

"Is Mr. Bealby at home?" he at once inquired of the landlady.

"Yes, sir," responded. "Pray walk up, sir; I know that he will see you at once. He has packed up the mummy all ready to send home to your house——"

"Capital!" ejaculated Mr. Fossilton, with accents of delight. "To tell you the truth, my dear madam—knowing from what you whispered to me yesterday, how poor Bealby was pressed for money—I was afraid that he might go and find another customer for that mummy

of his; and I would not for the world have let it slip through my fingers. I know it is at least three thousand years old—the state of the wrappings proven it.”

“Pray walk up, sir: I know Mr. Bealby will be very glad to see you. He has sent out to hire a cart to take the mummy up to your house,” continued the garrulous landlady: “I dare say it will be here in a few minutes.”

“Excellent!” ejaculated Mr. Fossilton. “Do you know, ma’am, there is food in that mummy——”

“Food in the mummy, sir?” cried the landlady, almost shrieking out in her astonishment.

“I mean food for the mind, my dear, madam,” responded the archaeologist,—“for a disquisition of at least six hours! Oh, the pleasure of unfolding the wrappings of that mummy! But I believe that I am to hand over the price to you?”

“Well, not exactly, sir,” replied the landlady: “circumstances is now changed. Mr. Bealby is a very honourable gentleman—he has paid me my rent—— But pray walk up, sir: he is just going to sit down to his breakfast; and his friend Mr. Limber—a very nice young gentleman, who brought him the money—will be back in a few minutes.”

Bealby had heard the double knock at the front door; and at first he had thought it was Limber who might have forgotten to take the latch-key. But when two or three minutes elapsed and Ben did not make his appearance, Mr. Bealby began to get uneasy lest inquiries were being made relative to the Barker. He did not dare leave his apartments to step out upon the landing to listen—much less to steal down stairs to see who it was—because Mary was running to and fro, preparing the breakfast: he knew her to be inquisitive, and he feared that she might be seized with the inclination

to draw aside the green baize and to the coffin-like box in order
the mummy looked when
its back. Thus Bealby
tate of anxiety for several
he at length recognised

the footstaps and then the voice of Mr. Fossilton as he ascended the stairs in company with the landlady.

Mr. Bealby foresaw that he should have some difficulty in respect to this visit: for Fossilton might ask to have another look at the mummy before he

concluded the bargain—or he might insist upon taking it away with him; and Bealby, well acquainted with his landlady’s garrulous disposition, was quite certain she had already acquainted him with the supposed fact that the mummy was in the readiness for such immediate transport to its destination. However, Mr. Bealby hoped that the difficulty occasioned by Fossilton’s visit might be speedily surmounted by his own ready wit; and he therefore prepared himself for the emergency.

“I am sure I did right to tell you to walk up, sir,” said the landlady, who since she had received her rent was all civility, and was now prepared to make herself most officiously obliging.

“Mr. Bealby will be quite charmed to see you. You will find the mummy already packed up——”

“Well, well, ma’am,” said Mr. Fossilton, “you have told me so two or three times; and I have no doubt it is the case. How do you do, Mr. Bealby?”

“How do you do, my dear sir?” cried the younger archaeologist. “Pray walk in. Your visit is an early one—I am sorry to say I am excessively busy just at this moment——”

“Busy in getting your breakfast?” said Mr. Fossilton; “but that won’t prevent us from settling our little bargain. I have brought the money—and I understand your friend has gone for the cart——”

“Here it is!” exclaimed the officious landlady, rushing to the window, as she heard the sound of the vehicle stopping at her front door.

“Ah! but I have a few other goods to remove first,” said Mr. Bealby; “and the mummy shall come next. You need not pay me now, Mr. Fossilton: I will bring you up the mummy in the course of the day—a few hours indeed——”

“My dear sir,” interrupted the old archaeologist, “I have set my mind upon having it at once: I have walked down from Tavistock Square at this early hour on purpose to see you. You can let me have this cart—and your friend can hire another.”

“I can do nothing of the sort,” said Mr. Bealby, who was getting uncommonly anxious, though he dared not for the life of him betray his uneasiness. “I must remove goods first——”

“Stop! there is another cart!” ejaculated the landlady: “and it is a man

which I know and which calls for pertation. "Mary!" she shrieked forth from the landing to which she flew; "stop that pertative person—and say I have got him a job!"

"What the devil does all this mean?" demanded Ben Limber, as he now made his appearance. "I have hired a cart and made a capital bargain."

"And now there are two," said Mr. Fossilton; therefore I may at once take my mummy home. Here, Mr. Bealby, is the amount agreed upon—twenty pounds;" and the old archaeologist, producing his pocket-book, drew forth the bank-notes from amidst a profusion of documents, all relating to his favourite sciences—especially a copy of a speech of seven hours' duration which he delivered at the last meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

Ben Limber now understood it all; and he perceived in what an awkward dilemma his friend Bealby appeared to be placed. But Mr. Bealby had by this time made up his mind how to act; and he therefore said with great coolness, "Well Mr. Fossilton, since you are in such a hurry to become possessed of the mummy, we will conclude the bargain at once. Here it is;"—and he opened the trunk to which it had been consigned on being taken from the glass case.

"Well, dear me!" exclaimed the landlady, "I thought it was in that package which was already done up to be removed."

"I wish, ma'am," said Bealby, "you would have the goodness to leave me to manage my own business."

"Oh! well, sir, I'm sure I don't want to interfere," said the landlady, tossing her head indignantly. "I was only helping to the best of my ability; but I hope I may never speak another word if you didn't say just now—or leastways give us all to understand, that the big package yonder——"

"There's something strange in all this," said Mr. Fossilton. "Are you sure it's the same mummy you are now selling me,—the same that used to stand in the glass case——?"

"Look you, Mr. Fossilton," interrupted Bealby; "a few words will explain it all, I have got some articles of a delicate and peculiar kind which I have sold to a gentleman; and I have packed them up in the glass case. For that reason I put the mummy into the trunk. Your profound knowledge will show you that it is

the same mummy. Here it is, with its wrappers—I forget how many years old you pronounced it to be."

"Well, well," said the old gentleman, who in the meantime had been carefully examining the mummy through his green glasses: "It certainly does seem the same—it is no doubt all right. And now let it be conveyed in that trunk down to the cart."

"Here, ma'am," said Bealby, thus hastily whispering to his landlady, "just give the potato person, as you called him, a little drop of gin to drink, as it was very civil on his part to stop when Mary called him;"—and he thrust a shilling into the woman's hand.

She sped away to give one drop of gin to the potato persons, and bestowed half a dozen upon herself; a cord was put round the trunk; and Limber assisted by Mary, conveyed it down stairs—old Mr. Fossilton following. The instant they were gone, Bealby closed the door; and hastening to pull aside a portion of the green baize, he whisperingly asked, "Are you all right? have you got enough air?"

"Blow me," growled the Barker, "if I could have foreseen there was a going to be such a precious shindy as all this——"

"Well, never mind—everything will be all right!" answered Bealby. "We will soon get you down into the other cart; I shall drive off with you—in half-an-hour the open fields will be gained beyond Holloway—and then you will be free as air."

"Make haste then," said the Barker from the depth of the coffin-like box; "for I'm so precious squashed and scrouged up here, I don't think as how I shall ever get the use of my limbs again."

Bealby sped to the window; and looking out, saw that the trunk containing the mummy, was just being consigned to the cart driven by the potato person, as the landlady most elegantly called him. Old Mr. Fossilton was helped up by Ben Limber into the vehicle; and seating himself upon the trunk, he took a huge pinch of snuff in complacent and satisfactory anticipation of the pleasure he was shortly to enjoy in unrolling the bandages which for three thousand years, as he thought, had enveloped his precious acquisition!

The potato person whipped the horse—the animal started off—but unfortunately at the very instant the red or

bar which kept the body of the cart tight down upon the shafts, accidentally came out. Up tilted the cart; and lo and behold! trunk, archaeologist, and potato person were all pitched backward into the street. The cord fastening the trunk, either snapped or became untied; and out rolled the mummy. Mr. Bonthy beheld the accident from his window, and gave vent to an ejaculation of mingled rage and disappointment.

A crowd instantaneously collected; and as Mr. Fossilton raised himself up with difficulty from the stones on which he had been so rudely flung, he thrust his elbow into the mummy's mouth, and sent the hideous looking apology for a face crashing in.

"My eyes, here'n ago I" shouted a man from the Market, with half a dozen ropes of onions pendant to a stout stick over his shoulder, and a short clay pipe in his mouth.

"Hooray!" vociferated another individual from the same precincts, and who bore a basket of cabbages upon his head.

But those who were nearest to the scene of the accident, looked on with mingled dismay and horror; for the first glimpse they had caught of the hideous chaps, as it rolled out of the trunk, naturally inspired those feelings.

"Mummy—O my poor mummy!" moaned Mr. Fossilton, who was reduced to despair.

"What's the old gentleman a saying?" asked a ragged boy of a dilapidated eostermonger.

"Vy, don't you hear?" was the response: "he's a calling out for his mammy."

"My eyes!" cried another: "he's rayther an old boy to afeard that his mother should know he's out!"—and this jest was received with uproarious "ughter."

"s his mummy, you feel," said a at superior species of the Market on; for the speaker had on some holiday visited a museum of as. That's a mummy—most King of Egypt, which died three thousand years ago and was d in bandages just as you pro-guns in vinegar." mummy indeed I" said a man, leathern apron on who having l from the nearest public-house, ked his way through the crowd

with the well-meant purpose of rendering his assistance. "A rare looking mummy this here! It's uncommon like leather."

Thus speaking, the aproned individual took up a piece of the smashed countenance; and first breaking it into minuter fragments, he put a morsel between his teeth.

"Oh, the cannibal! Blowed if he ain't eating the mummy!" ejaculated several voices; and the foremost of the crowd gazed with a kind of awe-felt curiosity upon the mummy; and with mingled surprise and disgust upon the man in the leathern apron.

"Mummy indeed I" exclaimed the individual scornfully. "I 'posse you'll tell me next that I don't know what leather is. I haven't been a cobbler for these twenty three years without knowing summat about the article I works with."

"Leather I" cried the indignant Mr. Fossilton, forgetting his accident—forgetting the crowd—forgetting the public place in which the scene was occurring—forgetting indeed everything except the sense of insult he was now smarting under at the idea of the gross manner in which the reputation of his mummy was assailed. "Leather? I tell you that this is a mummy—the corpse of some distinguished person of an ancient age—three thousand years old if it's a single day!—and that I'll swear by the wrapping! I am ashamed of you, my man, if it were an old shoe on which you were called to pass an opinion, it would be all very well."

"Three thousand year old—stuff and nonsense!" ejaculated the cobbler disdainfully, "I tell you it's leather—burnt, scorched, or something—And, by jingo! if I don't think it's some that I sold a gentleman which lives up there in the second storey of that there house, and which is knowed to be uncommon clever at getting up these here sort of things."

At this crisis Mr. Limber, who had hitherto remained upon the spot to listen to what was taking place, was seized with a panic; and he sped away as fast as his legs would carry him. The unfortunate archaeologist Mr. Fossilton began to look terribly crestfallen. He stooped down—took another green view of the mummy through his glasses—then pulled off the glasses themselves—and examined it more closely with his naked eyes. He could no longer conceal from

himself that he had been grossly deceived. If the accident had not occurred to the mummy, breaking a portion of it, and thus showing of what it was composed, the probability is the cheat never would have been discovered, and Mr. Fossilton would have gone down to his grave in the happy conviction that he died in possession of a human relic thirty centuries of age. But now unfortunately the delusion was dissipated—the vision was dispelled—and this learned archaeologist found that he had given twenty pounds for the mere purpose of being egregiously laughed at, jeered, giped, joked, and taunted by a motely crowd of some two hundred persons.

His orders were quickly issued to the driver of the cart—or the potato person, as Mr. Bealby's landlady politely and courteously designated him. The mummy was thrust back into the trunk—the trunk was taken upon the shoulders of the potato person,—who, preceded by the indignant Mr. Fossilton, began to ascend the stairs towards Mr. Bealby's apartments.

The little scene which we have described from the moment of the tilting up of the cart, to that when the unfortunate mummy was being borne back to him who had manufactured and vended it, occupied about five minutes. Let us see what in the interim had taken place in the apartments of Bealby himself.

From his window the fabricator of curiosities had observed the catastrophe; and he had seen the cobbler emerge from the public-house. In him he recognised the very man of whom he had bought the old leather which formed one of the component parts of the mummy. Then he perceived his friend Mr. Benjamin Limber vanishing from the scene; and he felt convinced that some disturbance would ensue.

"Deuce take it!" he exclaimed, retreating from the window, and hastening back to the cage in which the Barker was confined, "Here's an accident!—the cart has upset—the mummy has tumbled out—I think the trick is discovered!"

"What trick?" exclaimed the Barker, with so sudden a start, convulsively given inside the cage, that it was a wonder he did not smash the glass lid above him.

"Nothing about you!" replied Bealby hastily. "That cursed mummy I mean!"—and back again he ran to the window. "As I live, that old scoundrel Fossilton is having the mummy brought back! I shall be compelled to disgorge the twenty pounds!"

"I say," vociferated the Barker from the glass cage, "I've had enough of this—I can stand it no longer! Just let me out. My limbs is all cramped—a hundred million needles and pins is a pricking my feet. Let me out, I say!—or I shall be suffocated!"

"Stop! an idea strikes me!" ejaculated Bealby. "What if I get old Fossilton to take you off to this house——But not it will never do!"

"And why not?" asked the Barker. "Blowed if I don't think it's the best thing to be done. Just leave me to manage the old rogue when I do get to his house——"

"No, no!" responded Bealby: "no harm—no violence!"

"Nonsense! I'll only frighten him out of his life——"

"It must be so!" said Bealby. "Hush!—they are mounting the stairs!"—and he turned to meet the indignant archaeologist, whose cane was fiercely tapping every step as he led the way to the second storey.

CHAPTER CXVIII.

THE ARCHEOLOGIST.

THE landlady, who had been standing at her front door to look at the accident, the crowd, and the disturbance, made way for Mr. Fossilton and the potato person to enter. Then, closing the door in the face of the crowd that came to peep in with intense curiosity, she followed the enraged archaeologist and the bearer of the trunk up the stairs,—not rightly comprehending what had taken place, and therefore all the more anxious to push herself into Bealby's apartments.

"Here, sir, is a pretty trick you've played me!" exclaimed Mr. Fossilton, as he entered Bealby's front room.

"One word, my dear sir," said the ready-witted Mr. Bealby. "Here are your bank-notes; but just allow me to explain myself—and if my explanation is not satisfactory, you can take your

money and be off with you. Here, you man, put down that trunk—there's half-a-crown for you—and take yourself off with your cart. Just have the kindness to tell that other carter who is waiting, to remain yet a little while; and I will settle with him also."

Mr. Bealby issued his instructions with much composure and self-possession; the trunk containing the unfortunate mummy was deposited upon the floor—the potato person touched his hat for the half crown, and took his departure.

"Now, my dear ma'am," said Bealby to the landlady, thrusting another shilling into her hand, "just get something to comfort you after all this disturbance—and leave me to explain matters to my friend Mr. Fossilton."

The landlady accordingly vanished: the door was closed—and the old archaeologist, assuming a peremptory air, said "Now, Mr. Bealby, for these explanations."

"They are speedily given," was Bealby's ready response, "It is all nonsense about crying down the mummy, and all falsehood that the cobbler told you, just because I happened to owe him for a pair shoes. Pray don't interrupt me! I see that you think the mummy to be worthless; you are prejudiced—Well, let it be granted that it is an imposture—I at least took it for a genuine article. However, it was not the one you were going to have sent up to you—"

"How? what do you mean?" demanded Mr. Fossilton.

"You bought the mummy in the glass case—and there it is, ready packed to be sent to you. I said so from the very first—"

"Ah! but you afterwards denied it," said Mr. Fossilton: "you told me likewise you had packed other things in the glass case—"

"All nonsense on my part!" ejaculated Bealby. "You saw that young gentleman who has with me—the one who went and fetched the cart? Well, I bought a mummy—this was last week a fancy to the one in the shop—and offered me fifty pounds—"

"I agreed—but I did not mean to let him have it: I intended it all along for you. I meant to give him another—in short, that very one that the hubbub has just been about. But he came early this morning to secure his bargain—you came shortly after—you

both bewildered and confused me—I scarcely know how to act—"

"Ah! ha!" said Mr. Fossilton: "I begin to understand! So the real mummy—my mummy—is in that glass case after all?"

"Yes—and you may take it away with you at once!" said Bealby: "the cart is at the door. Stop!—there's no need to go peeping through the banister! Here's your twenty pounds—examine the mummy as much as you like when you get it home at your own house—consult all your friends—and if I have deceived you, tell me I'm a rogue. But if not send me the money by post—or by hand—or bring it to me—anything you like, only be quick and let us make an end of the business!"

Mr. Fossilton evidently thought this a very fair, candid, and straight forward proposal. He therefore took back the bank-notes from Mr. Bealby—and said, "Well I accept the arrangement. You know I am a man of honour: if the mummy suits, I will pay you."

"Good!" ejaculated Mr. Bealby; "that will do. I mean to accompany you to your own house, just to see the case safely delivered, and assure myself that there is no further accident. Have the kindness to call over the landing for Mary, that she may bid the carter come up and help me down with the package."

Mr. Fossilton did as he was desired; and Mr. Bealby, hastily approaching the case, whispered through the hole in the glass lid, "It is all right!"

"So much the better," growled the Barker from within.

Bealby gave a last look, but a careful and scrutinizing one at the green baize and the cordage, to assure himself that the box was completely enveloped in the wrapper. A few moments afterwards the man whose cart had been hired by Ben Limber, made his appearance in the room. He was a strong burly fellow; and by his stalwart limbs, his broad shoulders and capacious chest, seemed quite capable of carrying the package without any assistance. Therefore, when Mr. Bealby lent his assent, the carter did not complain of the weight, although the Burkes was assuredly not the lightest individual in existence.

"You see," said Bealby, as they descended the stairs, "the box containing this mummy is lined with tin,—which makes it heavy; for I don't suppose

the mummy itself weighs above half a dozen pounds, wrappings and all."

"Lord bless you, sir! the weight's nothing," responded the carter. "If you worked in Common Garden, as I do, and had to carry a vaggin-load or taters, or what not, upon your shoulders at times when unloadin' the market carts, you wouldn't talk about this here package being heavy."

"Well, I am glad you do not complain," Mr. Boulby; "and if you are very careful in the business, and don't disturb this green baize at all, or let the air get into the box, you shall have an extra crown for your trouble."

This assurance greatly delighted the carter; and he resolved by his carefulness to win the present which was thus promised. The front door was opened: the crowd had by this time dispersed, with the impression that there was nothing more to see; and Mr. Boulby had the supreme satisfaction of beholding the package safely consigned to the cart.

"Do you mean to go with us?" he hastily demanded of Mr. Fossilton.

"To be sure I!" responded the archaeologist who would not for the world lose sight of the precious object which had already cost him so much trouble.

"Then jump up! be quick about it!" said Mr. Boulby; "and let us be off—or else we shall have more loiterers collecting in the hope of beholding another accident."

The cart drove away; and Mr. Boulby began to breathe more freely. He had succeeded in getting the Barker out of his house; and this was a most important achievement after all the adverse circumstances which had occurred. For he knew perfectly well that if it were discovered that he had harboured the escaped murderer, he would have drawn down upon his own head the vengeance of the law. How the Barker might presently extricate himself from the embarrassing position in which he would be placed, when Fossilton should proceed to take off the green baize wrapper,—was a subject of comparative indifference with Mr. Boulby: for he was resolved in his own mind not to return to his lodging until by some means or another he should be satisfied that the adventure issued in a way which was not likely to compromise himself.

Mr. Fossilton's house in Tavistock Square was reached in safety. The old gentleman was bachelor: he kept but two servants,—a one being a cook, who was more ancient, more blind, and more deaf than himself—the other being a country girl who acted as housemaid, and who being inexperienced in London life, was devoid of any impertinent curiosity. There was a side-entrance to Mr. Fossilton's abode; and it was here that the cart halted. The package was safely conveyed into a room on the ground floor, which served as the archaeologist's museum: the carter was liberally remunerated according to promise—Mr. Boulby lost not an instant in taking himself off—and Mr. Fossilton was now left alone with the baize-covered package, which had been deposited upon the floor in the middle of the room.

First of all looking the door, so that he might not be disturbed by the entrance of any of those archaeological friends who were in the habit of frequently dropping in to discuss the very interesting and useful subjects to which they so wisely devoted the whole attention and business of their lives,—Fossilton took a knife and proceeded deliberately to cut the cords which retained the green baize so closely wrapped round the glass case. Then he took a pair of scissors, and began to cut away the green baize from the top; because, inasmuch as it was folded two or three times round the case, he would have had to lift the case itself to remove the baize unless he adopted this shorter and easier plan of cutting it. He was very careful, in the operation, for fear of breaking the glass lid; and, as the reader will comprehend, when he had cut one fold lengthways, he had to do precisely the same to each successive layer of the enveloping cloth. Proceeding thus deliberately, Mr. Fossilton did not choose to take a peep into the case until the proper moment should arrive, when he could at one glance embrace the entire contents thereof. He did not wish to anticipate the pleasure which he flattered himself he was about to enjoy. Thus, slowly and gradually did he prosecute his work, in a methodical manner, until the last fold of the wrapper was cut through, and the whole of the baize fell away from the lid of the box!

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mr. Fossilton: and he peered in mingled astonishment and dismay over the object which now

met his view. "This is very strange!—very strange indeed! Why—how—what—eh?"

It certainly did *not* look like a mummy. The dress was white; there was a sort of turban on the head—the complexion of the individual was quite dark—there was a moustache upon the lip. Surely this was no mummy. And yet what else could it be? The eyelids were closed:—motionless as the dead lay the Burker!

Mr. Fossilton stopped lower down, and looked closer and closer into the case—or rather, we should say, through the glass lid, if this were a mummy it was the most extraordinary one, as well as the freshest, he had ever seen. Had Bealby deceived him? No: this was scarcely possible; because he had given him back his money—he had left himself at his mercy in respect to payment—everything seemed quite honourable, straightforward, and proper on that individual's part. Ah! a sudden thought struck Mr. Fossilton. Mr. Bealby had prepared for him a great surprise! How kind of Bealby!—how good of him! Doubtless it was some wondrous novelty in the sphere of what we may term Mummyism, which through the agency of that same excellent Mr. Bealby had now fallen into his hands! Enraptured with the thought, Mr. Fossilton opened the glass case and was in the act of stretching forward his hand to touch the countenance of the supposed mummy,—when the Burker suddenly opened his eyes and raised himself up to a sitting posture!

It was not exactly terror which seized upon Mr. Fossilton: it was a general stupefaction—paralysis of the senses, which, without absolutely depriving him of his consciousness, made him sink down upon a seat and gaze through his green spectacles, as well as open-mouthed, upon this extraordinary proceeding.

"Don't be afraid, old gentleman, I ain't agoing to eat you," said the Burker, as he now endeavoured to rise up completely from the interior of the case: but the task was a difficult one, his limbs being horribly cramped. "Well, I'm blowed if this here ain't pleasant—cuss it!"

Mr. Fossilton groaned—but did not move one hair's-breadth more than if he had been a veritable statue, or one of his own petrifications placed in that chair.

"Well, I'm aniggered if this ain't a pretty job!" continued the Burker,

growling savagely: "to get one's legs palsied as if they was frozen—blow me, it beats the gallows—beats it hollow!"

Here Mr. Fossilton, abruptly seized with the terrifying effect of a complete and utter revulsion of feelings, sprang from his seat and darted towards the door. The sense of sudden and frightful danger to which he thus became exposed acted like galvanism upon the Burker; and rushing after the archaeologist, he grasped him violently by the arm,

"Hold your tongue!—don't cry out—don't say a single word!" growled the Burker: "or by jingo, I'll do for you!—I'll cock your goose in a jiffy!"

Thus speaking, he at the same instant snatched up an old rusty sword which lay upon a shelf close at hand, and which was supposed to have been the one wielded by Edward the first at the Battle of Falkirk—or at least, such was the assurance given some time ago by Mr. Bealby when he sold the curious weapon to its present owner.

"What would you do, unhappy man?" asked Fossilton, trembling with mingled alarm and horror. "You would not murder me? No—no—you—you—you—would not mur—ur—ur—der me?"

"No, not if you keep quite!" responded the Burker. "I'm as innocent as a young-lamkin which skips in the fields when folks let me alone."

"But *who* are you? what does all this mean?" asked the bewildered Fossilton. "You are dressed like a Lascar—but you speak English—if not exactly with a purity of Bunyan's style, at all events with a certain facility—"

"Leave Corn and Bunton to themselves," said the Burker: "and now just listen to me, Therel! you'd better sit down again, sir—you're all over in a tremble and quiver—and shivery shaky like—come, sit down, I say—d'yo hear? It's no use your keeping near this door."

"Well, well—what do you want? who are you? and what does all this mean?" inquired the archaeologist, whose mingled bewilderment, terror and dismay defy all power of description.

"Now there's no use in shuffling about with the question," said the miscreant: and planting himself opposite the miserable archaeologist, who had again sank down into a chair, he added in a cool independent manner. "I suppose you've heerd tell of one Mr. Barnes, better knowed as the Burker!"

"Good heavens the murderer?" ejaculated Fossilton faintly.

"Well—you may call him *that* if you like," proceeded the ruffian: "but here he stands in his own precious identity afore you. Not another word, old gentleman!—dare to cry out, and I split your head open! There now! be quiet, like a good old man—and no harm will happen. I am going to take my leave of you in a few minutes; and I don't think the parting will be worry distressing for either of us."

Mr. Fossilton looked as if he entertained precisely the same view, and as if the speedier the separation took place, the better he should be pleased.

"Now you see, my fine old feller," continued Barnes, "it won't do for you to say a single word about this here business; 'cos why, if you gives information, and if I'm took on account of it, I shall worry coolly say that you was in the trick with Bealby to get me out of my trouble, but that you afterwards turned round upon me, 'cos why I didn't come up to the mark in the cash department."

"Good heavens! what a distressing position for a man like me to be placed in!" moaned the miserable archaeologist, giving way to this lamentations. "Miserable position! miserable, miserable!"

"Not a bit on't!" replied the Barker. "All you've got to do is to hold your tongue—and nobody will be the wiser."

"Well—I won't say a word—don't be afraid—but for heaven's sake go!" said Mr. Fossilton imploringly. "Go! and I will forget that you have ever been here—that I have ever seen you. But if this isn't the last time that I bargain for mummies——"

"To be sure! You'll know a trick worth two of that," ejaculated the Barker, with a chuckling laugh. "Now just let me sit down and write a bit of a note—and then I'll take myself off."

The miserable archaeologist pointed to a table on which there were writing materials; the Barker coolly seated himself, and proceeded to commit a few lines to paper. Though the billet was short; yet the process of writing it was some what a tedious one, inasmuch as Barney was a very indifferent penman; and thus, during the ten minutes he was

engaged with his correspondence, Mr. Fossilton sat in a perfect agony of dread and horror. To be there with a murderer—there with one who might suddenly turn round and murder him—the thought was hideous! The poor archaeologist's brain was in a perfect whirl; and he bitterly repented his dealings with Mr. Bealby. But the Barker really had no intention of harming the old man; he saw that it was easy to intimidate him, and that the effect of the intimidation would not speedily were off.

The note was concluded: it was folded up—sealed—and duly addressed to the personage for whom it was intended; and the Barker secured it about his person. Then rising from his seat, he surveyed himself in a looking-glass, and he felt convinced that his present disguise of a Lascar was, if anything, more perfect than even that of a Jew which he had so recently worn.

"Now, you understand, old gentleman," he said, turning towards the archaeologist, "the conditions on which we separate. You hold your tongue about me and I shall hold my tongue about you. But if so be you take any step to put the police on my track, I'll tell such a pack of lies when brought up before the beak, as shall get you lagged—that's transported, I mean—for harbouring a chap in my position. So now you know. Is it a bargain—or is it not?"

"It is! it is!" replied the trembling archaeologist. "Heaven knows I want to wash my hands of this business! There, there, my good man—not my good man—my man, I mean—anything you like to call yourself—there's a five pound note for you—and pray take yourself off!"

"Thank'ee kindly, sir," responded the Barker, who beheld in this little incident an additional proof of Mr. Fossilton's utter timidity and of his anxiety to hush up the matter as soon as possible. "Good by, sir."

Thereupon the Barker unlocked the door, issued from the room, let himself out by the side entrance, and gained the street.

CHAPTER CXIX.

RESPECTABILITY.

THE scene now shifts to a very elegant suburban residence on Brixton Hill. It was a villa—not very spacious, but genteel in its exterior—commodious and beautifully appointed internally. It stood in the midst of a well laid-out garden, in which there were hot houses and conservatories; while the occupation of a groom who was engaged in washing a handsome carriage of the description known as a *clarence*, seemed to proclaim that the occupant of the villa must be in very easy circumstances. And such was the case: for this beautiful suburban residence was the one to which Madame Angelique had retired about a week back, after having broken up her establishment in one of the fashionable quarters of London.

It was about the hour of noon—and Madame Angelique was reclining upon the sofa in a beautiful furnished parlour, with a number of French news-papers and Fashion-books scattered around her. She was dressed in an elegant *disabillee*, which however would have rather become a young lady of between twenty and thirty than the elderly dame of about fifty. But then she wore it with such an exquisite Parisian coquetry—and the beautiful French cap so completely concealed the false front which Madame Angelique wore—the rouge and the pearl-powder, too, were so artistically laid on—the brilliant set of teeth looked so perfectly natural, and did such infinite credit to the Parisian dentist who made them,—that Madame Angelique might certainly have passed herself off as being ten years younger than she really was.

A loud knock at the door presently made her lay aside the French Fashion-book which she was reading at the moment: for though she had given up her trade of milliner, together with the more questionable one which she had conjointly carried on,—yet she continued to experience a lively curiosity in everything which regarded the newest modes for ladies' apparel. The window of the parlour in which she was seated, commanded a view of the projecting portico of her villa-residence: so she rose from her seat, and just peeped between the muslin curtains to see who the visitor might be.

"Shadbolt!" she half ejaculated; and an expression of annoyance flitted over her countenance. "This man will prove an extortioner," she continued, musing to herself; "I see that he will—if I let him. But I must extricate myself from his clutches. Nevertheless, the fellow has hitherto been useful—"

At this moment the parlour door was thrown open; and a neatly attired, coquettish-looking female-servant, with very pretty features, duly announced Mr. Shadbolt. This individual was dressed in what both himself and his tailor meant to be the very extreme of fashion: but the natural vulgarity of the man marred all the effect which exquisitely cut garments would otherwise have produced. He wore a profusion of jewellery; indeed it would seem as if he had studied every possible means of crowding gold chains and other trinkets about his person. He affected a half-rakish, half jaunty air, as if he were perfectly satisfied with the style in which he was thus playing—or shall we say *aping* the West End gentleman?

"Well, my dear madam," he said, throwing himself upon the sofa, near the retired milliner, "how do you get on in your new abode?"

"Having only been here a few days," responded Madame Angelique, "I cannot as yet say much about it: but I have every reason to believe that I shall like it."

"Well, I think I am a little too early for lunch," said Mr. Shadbolt taking a gold watch from his pocket: "so we will have a little chat upon business before the tray is brought up."

"What business can you have to talk to me upon?" inquired Madame Angelique. "Now that those girls are fully disposed of—"

"Ah! was not all that capitally managed?" ejaculated Shadbolt, with loud hilarious laugh. "That was my idea—and it was I also who found Cartwright to carry out the business."

"Yes—there is no denying that the affair was capitally managed," said Madame Angelique. "But—"

"Ah! Cartwright is clever fellow—is he not?" proceeded the visitor. "In some respects he beats honest Ike Shadbolt. Only think of that young fool Augustus Softly marrying Armantine, and being so eager to display the certificate to Cartwright the next time called

"Well, Armantino is excellently provided for—at least for the present," observed Madame Angelique. "She will of course ruin Softly in process of time—"

"Oh! that's a matter of course!" ejaculated Shadbolt, with another hilarious laugh. "But I am sure I don't know which to admire most,—the way in which Cartwright managed with that fool Softly in respect to Armantino—or the manner in which he dealt with old Lord Wenham in respect to Eglantine. At all events we have done well for the two girls. Armantino is married to an Honourable—Eglantine to a Lord. And as for Linda—she is happy enough with Cartwright himself. Ah! but you should have seen that miserable fellow Choker's countenance when I personated Mr. Downy of the firm of Catchflat, Sharply, Rumrig, and Co.—"

"I have no doubt of it," said Madame Angelique, rather impatiently: "but we have discussed all these subjects before."

"Yea—and we have divided the spoil too," exclaimed Mr. Shadbolt with a laugh. "I must say that Armantino came down very handsome with five hundred pounds the moment she had married Softly—and Eglantine with five hundred also when she became Lady Wenham. But it was also generous on our part to let Cartwright keep all he got by Linda for himself,—you and me remaining content with five hundred apiece—the very identical sums we got from the girls—I suppose we must now call them the Hon. Mrs. Softly and Lady Wenham. Nothing like speaking respectfully of ladies in High condition!"—and again Mr. Isaac Shadbolt laughed hilariously.

"And you have had a good use of your share of the money, as well as of all the other little emoluments you have derived from your acquaintance with me;"—and as Madame Angelique thus spoke, she slowly surveyed the well-dressed, gem-bedizened person of Mr. Shadbolt.

"To be sure, to be sure!" said this individual, complacently playing with the watch chain which festooned over his silk waistcoat. "But now to business! It is my intention to make hay while the sun shines—strike while the iron is hot: that is the invariable maxim of honest Ike Shadbolt—and it is one to be followed by all sensible people!"

"What do you mean?" asked Madame Angelique. "Of course you cannot suppose—"

"That I am to prey upon your purse?" interrupted Mr. Shadbolt. "Certainly not! Ah! you see that I understood what was passing in your mind. But come—don't be alarmed!—it is all fair and above-board. Do you not recollect that when you were going to give up the millinery establishment, I said I would put you up to making a little money in other ways—"

"I recollect perfectly," answered Madame Angelique: "but I thought when we had accomplished all those things in respect to Armantino, Eglantine, and Linda—"

"That my inventive genius was exhausted? Nothing of the sort! It only shows how little you really know of honest Ike Shadbolt. Bless you, my dear madam! I am up to a trick or two I can assure you:"—and he winked most knowingly.

"Well, what do you mean?" asked the Frenchwoman impatiently. "I wish you would come to the point."

"During your time," proceeded Mr. Shadbolt,—"I mean while you have been enabled to oblige countless numbers of great and wealthy persons both male and female, I mean, in plain terms, that many lords, ladies, and gentlefolks, have seen the interior of your private rooms at the fashionable establishment which you have just given up—eh?"

"To be sure," said Madame Angelique. "And what then?—what do you mean me to understand—"

"You shall soon see," continued her visitor: "and then you will form a still higher opinion of your obedient humble servant, Isaac Shadbolt Esquire. Please to listen attentively. At this fashionable house of yours there have been wives who did not come there to meet their husbands—and there have been unmarried ladies who did not afterwards marry the lovers whom they met there, but who have since been conducted to the altar by credulous once who little suspected their antecedents. Is not all this true?"

"Very true," responded Madame Angelique, "And now I see what you are driving at—"

"Stop! let me finish, and we will debate upon the subject. You *must* be aware, with a little reflection, that in having accommodated so many different

ladies and gentlemen, you established everlasting claims upon their gratitude—and which claims, my dear madam," added Shadbolt significantly, "they will not dare to ignore. I tell you what you must do. Just make out a list of some ten or a dozen of the ladies who are thus indebted to you, so that we may hold a committee of ways and means and vote the amount which each lady is to contribute to our treasury. Then I tell you how we'll manage it. You shall write a sweet pretty little note—pink paper—scented—folded into three-cornered shape—and all that sort of thing; and you will say in each note something to the following effect:—'Madame Angelique, having retired from business, respectfully solicits the earliest convenient settlement of Lady So-and-So's account—4741., as per bill delivered, Madame Angelique begs to add that she has placed her outstanding accounts in the hands of Mr. Isaac Shadbolt, who will save her ladyship the trouble of sending to Brixton Hill, by personally waiting on her ladyship at So-and-So Mansion.'—There! what do you think of that?" exclaimed Shadbolt triumphantly.

"None of these ladies owe me anything at all," responded Madame Angelique: "they have all paid me——"

"I know that very well," said Shadbolt; "and you know equally well that it has nothing to do with the case. You write the billets—let me take them—and you will very soon see if in every instance I do not obtain the money. If any indignation is shown, I shall very soon give the fair ones to understand that it is a bribe for your secrecy in respect to their former doings at your house. In short, it is a genteel and pleasant little mode of extortion which they cannot possibly resist.

Madame Angelique reflected for some moments; and then she said, "I would rather not do it—much rather not."

"Oh! I understand!" cried her visitor petulantly; "you have not sufficient confidence in honest Ike Shadbolt? you think that when I once get hold of the money, I shall use the last syllable of my name—which means *bolt*. But there's nothing of the sort to be feared. Honour amongstst—ahem! I mean honour betwixt Madame Angelique and honest Ike Shadbolt."

"Still I would rather not," answered the retired milliner.

"How ridiculous!" ejaculated Shadbolt. "You know that you can trust me. Besides, give me one little billet at a time; and as I bring back the cash to be divided, you can give me another."

"You do not understand my objection," said Madame Angelique. "The truth is that my late business was nearly getting me into such serious trouble—as no one better knows than yourself—that when I settled down here at this villa, I made up my mind to lead a quiet life and avoid everything that could possibly involve me in difficulties for the future."

"But there is no chance of trouble in what I propose," persisted Shadbolt. "The proceeding——"

"It is extortion—or attempted extortion—or whatever the English laws call it," observed Madame Angelique.

"Not a bit of it! Suppose, for instance, a lady defies you—takes the high ground—says that she owes you nothing—that she can produce your receipts—and that she does not understand the nature of the threats held out through me? Well, if we really see that the game can't be played in that quarter, an apology must be made. 'Madame Angelique presents her compliments to Lady So-and-So, and deeply regrets that a mistake should have been made in respect to her ladyship's account, which was entirely owing to an erroneous entry in Madame Angelique's books; but which is now completely rectified.'—What can be better than that?"

"This does indeed look feasible," said Madame Angelique: "but I will think over it—there is no hurry for a day or two—I will let you know."

"Good!" said Shadbolt. "There is, as you say, no hurry in the matter. And now I'll ring for lunch."

With that free-and-easy, independent manner which characterized him, Mr. Isaac Shadbolt pulled the bell; and when the pretty maid-servant answered the summons, he said, "Your mistress wants you to bring up lunch, my dear."

"Yes, sir!"—and the girl was about to retire.

"Stop one moment!" exclaimed Mr. Shadbolt. "Bring up everything cold there is in the larder, so that I can take my choice—and some bottled stout—port and sherry, of course—and I don't mind having a glass or two of that fine old Madeira——"

"Bring up the tray, Jane, as usual," said Madame Angelique, thus addressing herself to the servant and cutting short her visitor's multifarious orders. "Mr. Shadbolt," she continued, when the maid-servant had withdrawn, "I must beg of you to let me be the mistress of my own house. You are very welcome to visit me—and if we enter into that business of which we were just now talking, it will be necessary that you should call frequently. But you must not usurp an authority within these walls—you would compromise me seriously. Pray bear in mind that I have got an entirely new set of servants—none of those that I had at the other establishment. All they know of me is that I am Madame Angelique, the fashionable milliner, who has retired from business on a fortune——"

"And quite enough for them to know! Depend upon it, my dear madam, you shall never be compromised by honest Iko Shadbolt."

"I hope not," responded the French-woman emphatically. "There is not a soul in the neighbourhood who suspects that there was anything wrong in that establishment of mine: the clergyman has already left his card—two or three good families have likewise called——"

"Then you will be giving a party soon," exclaimed Mr. Shadbolt: "and I shall be master of the ceremonies. By the bye, that is an uncommon pretty girl—the parlour-maid, I mean——"

"I hope you will not speak to her familiarly, nor look at her insolently," said Madame Angelique, with grave and serious demeanour.

"No, no, my dear madam!" responded Shadbolt. "I do not forget that you have grown respectable. Ah! it's—capital thing to become respectable" and settle down in a respectable neighbourhood—and be visited by respectable families—and go to the Protestant Church or the Catholic Chapel in a respectable way on Sundays—Ah, by the bye! if I were you, my dear madam, I would come the church dodge. Be sure to hire a pew—go to church regularly; and if you can snivel a little bit in the middle of the sermon—of course choosing the proper part—your respectability is established."

Madame Angelique could not help smiling at this tirade into which Mr. Ieano Shadbolt launched forth; and she

said, "Well then, if you are so very anxious that I should keep myself respectable, pray do your best to keep up my respectability. Don't call the servant girl *my dear*——"

"Nor yet chuck her under the chin," added Mr. Shadbolt.

"You don't mean to say you've done it?" cried the French woman in alarm.

"Done it? Oh, dear me, no! not for the world! Besides, the girl is too ready with her hand in slapping one's face——"

"Then you *have* taken liberties with her!" exclaimed Madame Angelique.

"Now really this is too bad——"

"Pray don't entertain such an evil opinion of your devoted friend honest Iko Shadbolt. I only meant that she looks like a girl who *would* slap a fellow's face——But hush! mum!—here she is!"

The lunch was now quite edifying to observe the curious manner in which Mr. Shadbolt endeavoured to look grave; serious, and well conducted—pursing up his mouth, and only furtively leering from the corner of his eyes at Madame Angelique and Jane to mark the effect which he produced. When the pretty maid-servant had retired, he indemnified himself for three minutes' seriousness by five minutes' laughter; and then he began to pay respects to the cold chicken the ham, and the Medirae.

"Talking about respectability," continued Mr. Shadbolt, "I highly approve of your determination to maintain that respectability here. People in a certain class of life can't get on without it. Take your grocer, for instance, who all the week has been selling sugar mixed with sand, sloe leaves for tea, chicory for coffee, turmeric for mustard, ground bones for arrow root, and every other kind of abomination: but he goes to church on Sunday, and is, of course, a most respectable man. It is the same with everything else——"

"No doubt," said Madame Angelique again smiling.

"But I tell you what I should advise you to do," resumed Shadbolt. "Just send a twenty pound note to some Missionary Society—that one of Choker's, for instance——"

"No—I am not quite such a fool as all that," replied Madame Angelique. "I think I shall establish my respectability in this neighbourhood on a very

sure basis without any such ridiculous proceeding. By the bye, I was going to ask you——"

"Ask me anything, my dear madam," interjected Shadbolt, "except to give up this bottle of Madeira until I have sent the last glass of it down my throat."

"I was going to ask you who that Captain Cartwright really is, that you introduced to me and who managed those affairs so admirably?"

"He really was once a Captain in the army," replied Shadbolt; "but he sold out and ran through all his money. Then he became a regular man upon the town—living on his wife—until a few years ago, when he visited Paris; and there he got in gaol for debt. Afterwards he returned to London, and became a secret spy of the Home office."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Madame Angelique. "A spy of the English Home Office?" she cried incredulously.

"Yes, to be sure," responded Shadbolt. "If you ever read the newspapers, you will see that every year twenty or thirty thousand pounds—I forget exactly how much—are voted for what is called Secret Service Money; and what do you think secret service money is for except for the employment of spies and all that sort of thing? Why, there's never a political meeting held by the working-classes but what the secret spies of government are present; and when anything very strong or very seditious is said, the spies always cheer the loudest."

"You astonish me!" said Madame Angelique.

"It's nevertheless a fact," replied Mr. Shadbolt; "and the reasons clear enough. The government likes to give a certain colour to the working-class meetings, because it frightens the middle classes and makes them stick all the closer to the aristocracy."

"To be sure! Now I understand!" said Madame Angelique. "But this Captain Cartwright of whom we were speaking——"

"He got into disgrace somehow or another with the government," continued Shadbolt; "I think it was for not swearing strong enough at a political trial some time back; and so he got his discharge. Then he took to living on his wife again; and so the business we

have lately put into his hand has been a splendid windfall for him."

While thus discoursing, the luncheon progressed; and when Madame Angelique had imbibed three or four glasses of the fine old Madeira, she began to feel less antipathy towards Shadbolt than she was wont to experience at times when she was not under any artificial influence. The idea strengthened in her mind that though she already possessed riches she might as well double their amount; and that as circumstances had thrown in her way so willing an instrument as this man, she might just as well render him still more useful. Accordingly, after having partaken of another glass, Madame Angelique said, "Well, Mr. Shadbolt, everything considered, I mean to adopt the proposal you made to me just now."

"I knew you would," responded this individual, who, during a brief pause in the discourse, had been making immense inroads upon the comestibles as well as upon the fluids. "The sooner we make a beginning, the better."

Madame Angelique reflected for a few minutes; and after enumerating several names in her own mind, she at length stopped at one the recollection of which appeared to give her great satisfaction.

"Yes—this is a sure card," she said, now giving audible expression to her thoughts. "You have nothing to do but present the note, which I will immediately write."

"And who is the lady?" asked Mr. Shadbolt.

Madame Angelique did not respond to the question; but placing herself at a writing-table near the window, she penned a note.

"Now, Mr. Shadbolt," she said, when she had folded, sealed, and addressed the billet; "if you think you are sober enough, after all that wine, to conduct the business properly, you may at once set about making your first experiment. Ballam Hill is at no great distance; you can find some vehicle to take you thither——"

"I will proceed on this mission at once," exclaimed Mr. Shadbolt, who was eager to begin. "As far being sober enough, the more I drink the better fitted I am for business."

Thus speaking, he received the note from the French woman's hand; and surveyed the address.

"Lady Anastasia Latham," said Mr. Shadbolt examining the note with a critical eye. "Very prettily written—accurately folded—the paper of a neat pale pink—the seal delicate and well formed—just such a billet as is worthy to be borne by so polished a gentleman as honest Ike Shadbolt."

With these words he stuck his hat airily and jauntily upon one side of his head; and pausing at the luncheon-table for a few moments to toss off another glass of wine, he took his departure.

Madame Angelique resumed her reading of the French papers and fashion books for some little while until she thought it time to ascend to her dressing-room and perform her toilet: for she was as yet in *dehabille*. In the meanwhile the carriage was ordered to be gotten in readiness to take her out for a drive: but it occurred that when she herself was dressed, the equipage was not quite prepared for her reception. Madame Angelique accordingly strolled in the little garden which separated the villa from the main road: and as she was passing by the gate, she perceived a person whom she took to be a poor Lascar sailor walking slowly along. Just at that instant an open carriage, filled with ladies, was approaching from a short distance; and Madame Angelique's quick eye at once recognised them as a genteel family dwelling in the neighbourhood, and who occupied the pew next to her own at church. But this family had not called upon Madame Angelique; and the ex-milliner was very anxious to win their good opinions. Here therefore was an opportunity to display her charity; here was an occasion to prove that if she possessed wealth she knew how to use it for the relief of her suffering fellow-creatures. Pausing at the gate, she beckoned the Lascar to approach,—at the same time that she drew forth her purse.

"You seem to be suffering very much from fatigue, my poor man," she said, speaking in English, and holding a half-crown over the gate at the very instant that the carriage with the ladies rolled past.

The Lascar only shook his head—but said nothing. Madame Angelique then addressed him in French: but still no reply—and only a shake of the head. She gave him the money: but as he took it, it struck her that a more savage, sinister-looking rascal she had not seen

for a very long time. He made an awkward bow, and continued his way. Madame Angelique's carriage was now in readiness; and she rode forth for her airing. She had not proceeded very far when a gentleman on horse back rode hastily past the carriage, proceeding in the same direction which the equipage itself was taking. The ex-milliner at once recognised the Duke of Marchmont, though it did not seem as if the nobleman himself was aware whose dashing turnout he was thus passing. He was unattended by any groom; and Madame Angelique said to herself, "His Grace is bent on some mischief, I'll be bound!—or else he would not be thus alone. Doubtless he is after some fair one? Ah, he will miss my assistance and intervention in such matters—as will a great many other persons likewise!"

The carriage having proceeded for about three miles along the main road, turned into a lane, so that by a circuitous route it might regain the villa,—thereby diversifying the excursion, and enabling Madame Angelique to enjoy the freshness of the breeze that was wafted through the foliage of the shady lanes along which the equipage was now proceeding. All of a sudden the carriage passed a spot where Madame Angelique caught sight of the Lascar whom she had relieved, and who was now talking to a gentleman on horseback. This horseman she also recognised:—he was the Duke of Marchmont.

The ex-milliner was struck by the singularity of the circumstance. Neither the Lascar nor the Duke had recognised herself as the equipage swept by; a she had distinctly heard the Lascar speaking at the moment—though what he was saying she could not distinguish. To herself he had been unable—or least had affected to be unable to speak either English or French: whereas with the Duke of Marchmont he was now discourse. And then too, could it be possible that the Duke was merely spurred by charitable motive to stop and talk to the man?—was he after riding about that neighbourhood for pleasure, without any settled purpose and was the meeting with this Lascar purely accidental, as casual, and as a less, as it might have been with other beggars? No: Madame Angelique was perfectly convinced that such was not the case. What, then, could it mean? She was bewildered—she

lost in conjecture: curiosity was excited—but she had no means of gratifying it.

It was verging towards five o'clock when this little incident took place; the drive was nearly at an end—and the villa was at no great distance. The equipage was nearing the point where the lane turned into the main road,—when the sounds of a galloping horse were heard and in a few moments a riderless steed swept past. It came from behind—therefore from the same direction where the Duke and the Lasoar had been seen together: and what was more, Madame Angelique felt convinced that it was his Grace's horse which she had just beheld.

The carriage stopped—the footman leaped down from his seat next to the coachman—and coming up to the window, he said, "I fear, ma'am, there's been some accident. It strikes me it was the horse of that gentleman whom we saw in the lane——"

"The very same idea struck me!" said the ex-milliner. "Let us go back as quick as possible—the unfortunate gentleman may have been thrown!"

Madame Angelique—being impressed with the conviction that the Duke of Marchmont was engaged in some private business, most probably of a character which he would rather not have pried and penetrated into—had forbore from mentioning his rank and her own knowledge of who he was. The equipage had to pass out into the road before it could turn to retrace its way along the lane; and this caused some little delay. But presently it was returning in the direction whence it had previously come: while Madame Angelique from the windows, and the servants from the box, were looking but in expectation of beholding the thrown horseman. On went the equipage,—until at length ejaculations burst from the lips of the domestics on the box; and in a few moments the carriage stopped at the very place where the ex-milliner remembered to have seen the Duke and the Lasoar talking together.

And there lay the Duke of Marchmont, stretched upon the ground, close by a gate against which the Lasoar was leaning when seen in discourse with his lordship. Down sprang the servants from the box; and the exmilliner alighted from the carriage. The Duke was found to be insensible; indeed at first they thought he was dead: but in a few minutes they ascertained that he was merely stunned.

"This looks uncommon like a violent blow, dealt with a bludgeon," said the footman, directing attention to the marks of a severe contusion upon the temple.

"There's no doubt of it!" said the coachman. "That Lasoar scoundrel must have knocked the poor gentleman from his horse: because this is the very spot where we saw them talking just now—and it isn't to be supposed that the horse threw the gentleman off all of a sudden before he had moved an inch away from the place."

"Convey him into the carriage," said Madame Angelique: "we have no means of restoring him here—we will take him to the villa."

"And what about that rascally Lasoar, ma'am?" inquired the footman.

"What can be done?" said Madame Angelique. "The fellow is doubtless at some distance by this time——Besides, our first consideration is for this gentleman——"

"He looks a person of distinction," observed the footman, as he assisted the coachman to convey the inanimate form of the Duke into the carriage.

"Now make haste home!" said Madame Angelique, as she settled herself inside in such a way as to sustain the head of the unconscious Marchmont.

The domestics sprang up to the box: and the lane happened fortunately to be at this part wide enough for the equipage to turn. It proceeded rapidly along towards the villa; and in the meanwhile Madame Angelique did her best to recover the Duke by fanning his countenance with kerchief. His chest began to heave—slowly at first—then with more rapidly consecutive convulsions: his painful gaspings appeared to be bringing back the vital breath, and setting the respiratory functions to work. He opened his eyes for a moment—but closed them again,—evidently without having comprehended where he was, nor who was with him.

In a few minutes his lips began to waver; and he murmured some words. They were incoherent, save and except in reference to one word—and that was a name—the name of his long lost brother Bertram! Madame Angelique listened with the suspenseful curiosity of one who expected to hear something more, and who had a sort of vague presentiment that it would be of importance,—though without at all anticipating what

its nature might be, or why she should have that impression. Her eyes were intently fixed upon the Duke's countenance which was very pale. His own eyes were closed; the mark of the contusion, and of abrasion likewise, was now more plainly visible than at first; it was evidently the result of a very fierce and savage blow which had deprived the Duke of consciousness—and most probably, as the domestics had surmised, knocked him from his horse.

Again was there a wavering of the lips; again did he give utterance to some words; and though his speech incoherent, yet were the words themselves audible as well as intelligible. Madame Angelique started: feelings of mingled wonderment, dismay, and horror seized upon her; and the very expression which they gave to her countenance, suddenly concealed as it were there,—remaining fixed and rigid upon her features. Her breath was suspended as she continued to listen with the profoundest, awfulest interest.

Again the Duke spoke,—his frame now writhing with the pangs which frequently accompany returning consciousness after a state of insensibility and at the same time too it appeared as if these physical pains engendered mental ones, blinding therewith in a strong convulsing agony. Under these joint influences did the Duke continue speaking,—incoherently, but distinctly audible; and with increasing astonishment did Madame Angelique listen.

The end of the lane was now reached; and there it appeared that some man who was passing had caught the riderless horse. The footman from the box shouted forth instructions as to whither the man was to lead the animal; and the equipage continued its way. The Duke was now rapidly recovering; and by the time the carriage reached the villa, he was sitting up, endeavouring to gather his recollections—and endeavouring also to comprehend what was being said to him by Madame Angelique, whom as yet however he did not completely recognise.

Though the ex-milliner had now regained her perfect self-possession,—yet if the Duke were completely sensible, he could not have failed to perceive that there was a sense of appalling wonderment in her soul—visible even beneath the gloss of composure which she now wore. She had learnt a tremendous

secret; and she was studying to have the appearance of one whose mind had not been disturbed beyond the excitement which might naturally be supposed to have arisen from the adventure itself. Just as the carriage drove up to the front door of the villa, the Duke recognised who his companion was; and this recognition seemed to give a sudden impulse to his intellect generally.

He was assisted from the equipage; and leaning on the footman's arm, he walked into the parlour. The man who had caught his horse was dismissed by Madame Angelique with a liberal gratuity; and the animal itself was consigned to the stable. The Duke was deposited upon a sofa: some refreshing beverage was administered; and as he was now completely sensible, Madame Angelique gave him to understand—without being observed by the domestics present—that his name and rank need not be revealed unless he thought fit. He made a sign to the effect that it would be better to observe caution on the point: and Madame Angelique soon found an opportunity of dismissing the footman and Jane from the apartment, on the plea that the gentleman was rapidly recovering.

The ex-milliner and the Duke were now alone together. The former explained how she herself had relieved the Lascar, who most unaccountably affected to be unable to comprehend her—how she had seen that man and the Duke in conversation together—and how the spectacle of the riderless horse had induced her to turn back towards the spot where Marchmont had been discovered in a senseless condition. But Madame Angelique made not the slightest allusion to the words which the Duke had so unconsciously spoken in the carriage, when gradually arousing from a state of insensibility.

"The fact is," said the Duke, after he had expressed his thanks to the ex-milliner for all her kindness, as well as for the prudent caution which she had used in respect to his name, "I took out my purse to give that ruffian relief—in the twinkling of an eye did he knock me from my horse—I remembered nothing more until I found myself seated by your side in the carriage. My purse, my watch, my rings are gone—"

"I felt assured you had been robbed," said Madame Angelique, "when in the carriage. I noticed that there was not any

jewellery about your person, But tell me, my lord—was there not something strange about that man—that villainous looking Lascar?"

"There might be," said the Duke dryly. "You have a beautiful place here—I intended to come and call upon you—I did not exactly know where your habitation was situated—and little did I suspect just now that I was passing my old friend Madame Angelique's carriage," added his Grace, with a familiar smile.

The ex-milliner saw that the Duke did not wish to be questioned in respect to the Lascar, and she therefore said not another word upon the subject. There were other topics which she also avoided—although she might have touched upon them; for the presence of the Duke had conjured them up to her memory. She might have intimated her suspicion that he was not altogether a stranger to the murderous attempt on the life of Sagoonah at Bayswater; but Madame Angelique beheld no utility in discussing such matters; and moreover she had hoped, when retiring from her own equivocal avocations, that she might entirely wash her hands of all the perilous intrigues and machinations into which she had at one time been led by the Duke of Marchmont.

"I do not wish this little affair to become bruited abroad," said his Grace, thus alluding to his adventure with the ferocious Lascar. "It is troublesome to have the police set to work—and all that sort of thing."

"Nothing need transpire," answered Madame Angelique; "I will tell my domestics that you are a Mr. Cavendish—or Fitzherbert—or some other fashionable name—and that as you are immediately going on the Continent, you do not think it worth while to delay your departure for the purpose of causing a pursuit, which perhaps may prove ineffectual, to be instituted after the ruffian Lascar."

The Duke thanked Madame Angelique for her readiness in managing the matter according to his inclination; and under the name of Mr. Cavendish he remained to dine with her. By about nine o'clock in the evening his Grace was so perfectly recovered as to be enabled to mount his horse and ride home to Belgrave Square.

CHAPTER CXX.

THE LATHAMS.

THE scene of this narrative shifts to a large and very handsome suburban mansion situated at Belham Hill. This thriving district, in a convenient vicinity of the metropolis, promises to become completely fashionable, and to acquire a reputation on that score equal to Clapham.

Tudor House—the mansion of which we are speaking—was situated in the midst of spacious grounds, which had however been too recently laid out for perfect beauty, but which were nevertheless sufficiently attractive. Indeed, it was quite evident that no expense had been spared upon either the mansion or the grounds, by Sir Frederick Latham, the owner of the property. This gentleman was about fifty years of age—a partner in one of the most eminent mercantile firms in the City of London; and he was exceedingly rich. The house to which he belonged had enjoyed opportunities of rendering at various times financial services to the Government; and thus, while a Peerage was conferred upon the senior partner, a Baronetcy was bestowed upon the second. This was how Sir Frederick Latham obtained the title which he now possessed.

He had somewhat recently married the daughter of a noble but impoverished family,—a lady in her own right; and thus his wife enjoyed the privilege of prefixing her Christian to her surname on all occasions—which will account for the fact of her being styled Lady Anastasia Latham. She was about one-and-twenty years of age and very beautiful. It was not however beauty alone which characterized her: there was something singularly interesting in the expression of her countenance as well as softly winning and unstudiously fascinating in her manners. Her features were regular, her nose being perfectly straight, the forehead not too high to be dissimilar from the style of beauty defined by the Grecian statues; while her brows were superbly arched and well divided thus giving an open frankness to the whole countenance. Her eyes were large and of a deep blue, full of a soft lustre, which seldom indeed concentrated itself in the lightning flash of strong passions but shining with that serene steadiness and evenness which seemed to indicate

the goodness, and gentleness, and benevolence of her disposition. About the mouth there was a singular beauty, not merely in its chiselling but also in its expression. Its formation was purely classical in respect to the upper lip, which was arched like Cupid's bow; the under lip was fuller and richer, but without conveying the slightest impression of sensuousness on the part of Anastatia. Her hair was of a rich brown; and of such luxuriance was it—with so superb a gloss too resting upon the surface—that it was no wonder if she generally wore it without any ornaments either of gems or flowers but as if conscious that it became her best in the unadorned wealth of its own natural loveliness. In heavy tresses and in massive clusters did it float upon her shoulders, and form as it were a back-ground for a neck of dazzling whiteness; for Anastatia's complexion was sweetly pure and transparent. She was tall and well-formed,—the contours of the Hebe combining with the slender graces of the sylph to constitute the perfection of her shape. In her toilet she was simple and modest—never seeking by means of low-bodied dresses for a meretricious display of her charms, nor caring much to avail herself of the sumptuous presents of gems and jewellery made by her husband for the embellishment of her person.

Such was Anastatia Latham; and we must now say a few words in respect to her husband. Sir Frederick was a tall man—somewhat inclined to stoutness, without being actually corpulent; he was perfectly upright, and carried himself with a certain stiffness,—which, together with his general appearance, impressed every one with the sense of cold formality on his part. Handsome he certainly was not; but he was equally far from being ill-favoured. His features were large; his forehead, exceedingly high and massive, gradually rounded off into the crown of the head, all the front of which was bald. Thus his iron-grey hair being worn away from that part, gave him a certain dignity of appearance, which by his manner he evidently strove to sustain. His blue eyes were of that cold expression which denotes calculating, business habits: they moved steadily in their orbits—never turning nor flashing restlessly. There was something severe too in the

expression of his thin lips, which if not actually compressed, were generally retained close and immovable—except of course when he was speaking. To look at him no one would give Sir Frederick Latham credit for genius, nor even talent: but at the same time there was a vast amount of wordly knowledge evidenced in the expression of that countenance. No designing man possessed of the least discrimination, would think of selecting Sir Frederick as his victim: wariness, shrewdness, and extreme caution were displayed in his look as well as in his speech. Without knowing who he was, a stranger would say, "That is a man who never does anything inconsiderately, but who coldly and dispassionately weighs every proposal that may be submitted to him."

Sir Frederick was rich and exceedingly fond of money,—not however for the purpose of hoarding it, much less of spending it extravagantly—but to enjoy it according to the common notions of that enjoyment which money can procure. He lived handsomely—kept fine equipages—gave sumptuous entertainments; but nevertheless was always careful to assume himself that he was not merely living strictly within his income, but that he would have a large surplus at the end of each year. As he had risen from comparatively nothing, he was proud of his position. He scorned all civic honours, and sought to draw himself nearer towards the Aristocracy of the country. He would not have accepted the post of Lord Mayor of London for a single hour: but in his heart he was infinitely elated, though outwardly he showed it not, when he was created a Baronet. He would have held it as a positive degradation to become an Alderman of London: but he was flattered and gratified when placed in the commission of the peace for the County of Surrey. He was proud of belonging to the great Moneyocracy of England; and if he by shrewd and cautious steps strove to introduce himself more and more into the region of the Birth Aristocracy, he never fawned upon a lord—never played the sycophant—never forced himself unasked upon the society of great personages. Wherever he went in that patrician sphere, his demeanour indicated the calm self-possession of one who felt that he was by no means out of

place, and that he was receiving no favour by being invited there.

Coldly calculating an Sir Frederick Latham was—endowed with common sense and worldly knowledge in the most accurate meaning of these terms—it may be a matter of surprise to the reader that after having remained so long unmarried, he should at length have conducted to the altar a lady who was young enough to be his daughter. On the other hand—considering Anastatia's exceeding beauty, her youth, and her accomplishments, her fascinating manners and her patrician birth—it may be also a matter of marvel that she should have failed to captivate any wealthy suitor in her own sphere. The dowdless daughter of an Earl and Countess—who, partly from extravagance and partly from the depreciation of property in the West Indies, where they had large estates, had barely enough to maintain themselves—Lady Anastatia's position was one which had rendered fortune indispensable on the part of whomever she might accompany to the altar. Still there was many a rich scion of the aristocracy who might perchance have sought to wed a young lady in every way his equal except on the score of riches: but to the astonishment of everybody the fashionable newspapers one day announced that "Sir Frederick Latham, partner in one of the most eminent city mercantile firms, was about to conduct to the hymeneal altar the young, lovely, and accomplished daughter of the Earl and Countess of Fordwich."

And the marriage took place: nor on the wedding day did there seem on Anastatia's part to be any particular sense of self-sacrifice—no indication of efforts being made to crush other affections which her young heart might possibly have formed. Her demeanour was serene; and those who knew her best, declared that there could be no dissimulation on her part—for that it was impossible the soul of one so pure could be infected with hypocrisy or guile. There were not however wanting at the time certain busy tongues to whisper that Sir Frederick Latham had rendered great pecuniary assistance to the Fordwich family, especially to Anastatia's only brother, Viscount Rushbrook, the heir to the Maridom. But on this point

nothing was certain: that is to say, no positive details could be relied upon—though, as a matter of course, it was patent to everybody that the marriage was one of expediency on the part of Anastatia's family,—the great wealth of Sir Frederick Latham being the idol on whose altar the young lady was sacrificed—though she herself might possibly feel that it was no sacrifice at all.

This marriage had taken place about two years previous to the time of which we are writing. Sir Frederick was then building his palatial mansion at Batham Hill; and it was not finished until the lapse of some months after the solemnization of those nuptials. But when completed, Sir Frederick and his wife removed to their new home, where they had since maintained a sumptuous establishment. The aristocratic marriage which Sir Frederick had contracted, fulfilled the darling hope which he constantly though secretly cherished: namely, introducing him thoroughly, and without any more cautious and guarded efforts, into the very best society. This was the real secret of the marriage so far as he himself was concerned—though the world suspected it not, because he had ever managed to conceal that *one* weakness which he possessed—we mean the yearning after patrician acquaintances. But as for his espousing so young a creature,—in the first place, the opportunity presented itself, and he had seized upon it. Secondly, his money-gratifying pride had made him calculate that his wealth was a far set-off against Lady Anastatia's high birth—and that in return for the riches he could give, the borrowed lustre of her rank was a fair compensation. And then again, no matter how shrewd a man may be in every other sort of calculation, yet in respect to matrimony he never thinks himself too old for a wife, however youthful: his vanity will not permit him to recognise the disparity which others see; he flatters himself that he possesses every quality to command respect and secure esteem. Perhaps in reference to love, a person of Sir Frederick Latham's disposition might have treated the idea somewhat scornfully,—looking upon it as a mere piece of romance—well enough for school-boys and pining misses to read about—but existing as nothing which ought to enter into those calculations whereupon matrimony is based.

Two years of wedded life had Anastasia thus experienced; and her lot did not appear to be an unhappy one. Those who had known her from her childhood, even went so far as to declare that she was perfectly happy. Very certain it was that she presided with the utmost amiability, as well as with cheerfulness, over the sumptuous entertainments which were so frequently given at Tudor House. There was always that interesting sweetness about her which, by a little stretch of sentimentalism, might be taken for an habitual pensiveness, serene without being melancholy; and thus perhaps it was quite natural for some to suppose that she had either courageously or else meekly resigned herself to the lot which destiny, operating through the medium of family circumstances and her parents' will, had provided for her.

There was no issue from this union; and Sir Frederick Latham was never heard to express a regret that he had no heir to his title and property. But because he said nothing, it was no reason that he felt nothing on the subject: he was a man who would never betray any cause of vexation—his pride would not permit him. He suffered himself not to be elated by joy, nor to be depressed by any circumstance calculated to vex or afflict. It was his study ever to maintain that sort of cold equanimity which was habitual to him, and which indeed answered so many purposes, alike in his business pursuits and in his intercourse with friends and acquaintances. Thus, even if he had longed with the deepest yearning for an heir, the world would not have known it.

We must say a few more words in a descriptive sense before we resume the thread of that episode which we believe will not prove the least interesting in our narrative. The reader will doubtless be anxious to know upon what terms Sir Frederick and his wife lived together. As there was assuredly no love on either side, there was no sentimental display of affection between them. Sir Frederick was as kind as his habits and manner would allow him to be; while Anastasia strove to perform to her utmost all the duties of a wife. There was nothing fond nor caressing, much less playful or uxorious, in Sir Frederick Latham's conduct towards his wife; but on the other hand, the

kind courtesy with which he treated her was never capriciously nor causelessly interrupted. He made her his companion, and in some respects his friend—but not wholly so: for he never spoke to her on business matters—never gave her the slightest insight into the extent of his wealth—merely proved to her by his deeds that he *was* wealthy, and considered *that* sufficient. In respect to the mansion and the grounds, he certainly consulted her taste at times on a few minor matters—but always in a way that seemed to indicate that his own opinion was already settled on the subject. Nevertheless, if Anastasia happened to express a desire that anything particular should be done, her husband said nothing to her at the time; but the mandate immediately went forth from his lips to those whom it concerned—the thing *was* done. Towards Sir Frederick, Anastasia was mild and gentle—because this was her nature: she was submissive without being servile—duteous without losing sight of her own proper dignity as a wife. As to the society they kept and the acquaintances they cherished, there could be no possible dispute between them, inasmuch as none but men of known honour and probity were ever introduced by Sir Frederick, while Lady Anastasia courted only the pure and spotless of her own sex as her companions.

We may now resume the thread of our narrative. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of that day of which we have been writing in the previous chapter; and Lady Anastasia Latham was seated by herself in a splendidly furnished apartment at Tudor House. Some visitresses had just taken their departure: and Anastasia was resuming some elegant fancy work which she had temporarily laid aside. Presently the door opened; and a footman entered to present a note upon a massive silver salver.

"Please your ladyship," said the man, "the person who delivered says that he will wait for your ship's answer."

Anastasia opened the folded, perfumed, pink which was thus handed to her, and found the contents to run

"Madame Angolique, having no business, respectfully solicits the convenient settlement of Lady Anastasia La

account. The sum is 563*l.*, as per bill delivered. Madame Angelique begs to add that she has placed her outstanding accounts in the hands of Mr. Isaac Shadbolt, who is the bearer of this letter, and who will save her ladyship the trouble of sending to Madame Angelique's villa at Prixtou Hill. By personally waiting on Lady Anastatia Latham on the earliest convenient day which her ladyship may appoint."

"There must be some mistake here," said Lady Anastatia, from whose cheeks the colour had flitted away for a moment, and to which the next instant it had come back with a deeper dye: yet her voice was calm as she spoke—and it trembled not in the faintest degree. "Tell this person to stop up."

The lacquy immediately retired; and in a few minutes Mr. Isaac Shadbolt was introduced into the room. In the meanwhile Anastatia had examined some papers in her writing desk; and thence she had taken out three or four of those documents.

"You, I presume," said Anastatia, in a calm, lady-like manner, as Mr. Shadbolt advanced into the room "are the person alluded to in this note?"—and she held up the one she had received.

"Precisely so, my lady," was the response. "I am honest Ike Shadbolt at your service."

"Then, sir," proceeded Anastatia, in a colder tone and with a more dignified manner—for it struck her that there was a certain approach to familiarity on Shadbolt's part; "I have only to inform you that there is some mistake in the matter, and which you will have the goodness to see rectified. Here are all the bills I ever received from Madame Angelique; and as you will perceive, they are duly receipted. Besides, I was never at any one time indebted to Madame Angelique in half the sum which this note of her's specifies."

"I see the bills, my lady," rejoined Mr. Shadbolt; "and I observe that they are all receipted too. But what is the date of the last?" and he peered impudently forward.

"A year back," said Lady Anastatia, who was evidently making an effort to command and preserve all the patience and civility which she was showing towards the man.

"Well, my lady—but then there's a bill since this last one," said Mr. Shadbolt boldly; "and it's that which——"

"No—you are wrong," rejoined Anastatia; "inasmuch as I have not dealt with Madame Angelique for a year past:"—and there was something bordering upon a calm, or rather suppressed indignation in the tone and look of the patrician lady.

"Ah, well, ma'am—it's all very fine," ejaculated Shadbolt, "for your ladyship to make this statement: but there is Madame Angelique's counterstatement——"

"I repeat, sir," interrupted Lady Anastatia haughtily, "there is some mistake! I will however look over my accounts, and see whether by any possibility there is one of Madame Angelique's which has remained unpaid. I am however positive that all the bills are here:"—and she indicated the receipted accounts which lay upon the table.

"And I am equally positive, my lady," responded Shadbolt, "that you *do* owe Madame Angelique this money—no matter whether an account has been sent in or not."

Anastatia had already shown more coldness and more hauteur, more indignant impatience and more proud dignity, in the space of a few minutes than she had ever done before; but it was now with the very haughtiest indignation and the very utmost of her indignant pride, that drawing her fine form up to its full height, she bent her beautiful blue eyes upon the intending extortioner,—saying, "This is the first time my word was ever doubted; and your conduct is bordering upon insolence. You can retire, sir. I will myself communicate with Madame Angelique in the course of a day or two."

"Very good, my lady," said Shadbolt, who was more than half inclined to speak with a still greater degree of insolence. "Mind you don't forget."

He then strolled jauntily out of the room; and Anastatia felt so hurt—her feelings were so wounded, her pride was so insulted—that she could scarcely keep back an outburst of tears. Not for a moment did she suspect the real purport of the note and the real object of the visitor—namely, that an extortion was intended: she firmly believed it was all a mistake on Madame Angelique's part, but that the ex-milliner had entrusted her business to a very

rude person whose coarse vulgar manners were ill calculated to qualify him for such a mission. A being of Anastatia's natural gentleness and amiability, felt such a scene as this far more than a worldly-minded woman would have done; and the very effort of summoning up her dignity, as well as that unwonted display of indignation, were followed by a reaction, which, as we have just said, almost reduced her to the weakness of tears. Shadbolt had not left the room many moments when Sir Frederick Latham entered.

"I have just received a note from your brother, Anastatia," he said, "in which the Viscount tells me——But you look distressed? Has anything happened to annoy you?"

The question was put merely with that calmly kind courtesy which Sir Frederick was wont to observe towards his wife; and there was perhaps a slight expression of concern on his countenance: but there was no endearment of manner—no caressing encouragement—no solace conveyed in sympathizing anticipation of whatsoever might be told him. Anastatia's grief was now suddenly mingled with confusion; and hastily gathering up the papers which lay upon the table—namely, the receipted bills which she had produced, and Madame Angolique's note which she had received—she swept them all into her desk—at the same time faltering forth, "No, no—nothing has annoyed me!"

"I am glad to hear it," said Sir Frederick Latham: but for a few moments his cold blue eyes were fixed steadily and searchingly upon his wife.

"You have had a letter from my brother?" she said, now partially regaining her self-possession; and at the very instant she raised her own eyes towards her husband's countenance, his looks were withdrawn from her, as if he would not for the world have it supposed that he was in any way surprised or troubled by the confusion of her manner and the singularity of her conduct.

"Yes—I have received a note from Viscount Rushbrook," continued Sir Frederick Latham, the calmness of whose look and manner completely restored Anastatia to her own self-possession. "His lordship announces his intention of coming to dine with us to-day; and as he moreover hints

that he has a little private business on which he is desirous to speak to me——"

"I hope—I hope," murmured Anastatia, as if seized with some new cause of vexation, "that my brother Robert——"

"Do not by any means annoy yourself," continued Sir Frederick, in the same calm imperturbable manner as before. "It is not on that account I mentioned the circumstance of his letter. It was simply to learn whether you expect any friends to dine with us to-day——"

"No, Sir Frederick," responded Anastatia. "You are well aware that I never issue invitations without previously consulting your convenience——"

"You are welcome to do so at any time you may think fit," answered Sir Frederick, but more with the air of one who was conveying a permission than who was bidding his wife exercise a right which was indisputably her own. "On my part I have invited no one to dine with us to-day; and therefore it is somewhat fortunate that after dinner I shall be left alone with your brother——I mean merely because he intimates that he has some business of importance on which to consult me."

"I have not seen Robert for some months past," said Anastatia; "and I hope in the name of heaven——"

"Again I tell you not to distress yourself," interrupted Sir Frederick. "If it is a matter of a little pecuniary assistance, he shall have it. Thank God, Lady Anastatia, your husband is a man who can afford it, without the slightest detriment to his own interests."

"I know you are very rich," said her ladyship: and then, as she looked tearfully up into her husband's countenance, she added, "But it is really too bad of Robert——"

"He exercises the privilege of a brother-in-law," remarked Sir Frederick: and there might perhaps have been a faint—though very faint expression of irony in his tone: but Anastatia perceived it not.

"You have been so good to him—you have done so much," she said,—"and under such fearful circumstances too——"

"Lady Anastatia," interrupted Sir Frederick, without the slightest change

in his tone, look, or manner—but with a sort of calmness, half business-like, half self-complacent,—“I have more than once begged you not to allude to those circumstances. Assuredly, if I had thought that the conversation would have taken this turn, I should not have spoken of that part of your brother's note which hints at important business.”

“But whenever my brother's name is mentioned,” answered Lady Anastatia, “I am always reminded—yes necessarily so,” she continued with much feeling, “of *your* great goodness and *his* wildness—I may even say his wickedness. Never, never can I forget it! And at the time when our parents would not see him—when he stood upon the very brink of ruin—when a frightful exposure threatened him—when the gulf was about to open at his feet,—you, Sir Frederick, come forward—not ostentatiously, but privately and secretly——”

“Stop, Anastatia!” said the great merchant: “this is sufficient. Let us allude to the topic no more.”

If a very acute observer had been present—one intimately acquainted with the ways of the world, and skilled in reading the mysteries of the human heart—would have been led to suspect, or indeed perhaps he would have plainly seen, that Sir Frederick Latham had suffered his wife to proceed to just that sufficient extent which ministered to his own vanity, and which reminded herself of the great pecuniary obligations under which her family laboured towards him; and that he had then stopped her just at the point where he might seem to have been listening hitherto for courtesy's sake, but beyond which to listen any longer would be perhaps to excite a suspicion as to his real motives. He now gave the conversation a complete turn; and shortly afterwards Lady Anastatia proceeded to her dressing room to perform her evening toilet.

CHAPTER CXXI.

THE LORD AND THE MERCHANT.

SHORTLY after five o'clock, a very elegant phaeton and pair dashed up to the entrance of Tudor House. This

equipage belonged to Viscount Rushbrook; and his lordship himself was driving it,—a groom in an elegant livery being seated by his side. The Viscount was smoking a cigar, and his whole appearance was of that dissipated, rakish, devil-may-care kind which denoted the spendthrift and the improvident one. He was five or six years older than his sister Anastatia; he was tall and well formed; he had dark hair, an aristocratic profile, and good features; but as we have just hinted, the traces of dissipation were upon his countenance. He was more over thoroughly heartless and unprincipled: he would sacrifice a friend at any moment if it suited his interests, or if his pecuniary wants had to be supplied. He cared not for sister nor for parents; but yet he was an accomplished hypocrite—and at any time, to gain his own ends, could simulate the utmost fraternal love or filial affection. From his very boyhood he had been reckless and extravagant: his proceedings at college had helped to make considerable inroads upon the already dilapidated income of his father the Earl of Fordwich; and it was whispered that on more occasions than one had he since the attainment of his majority been compelled to leave the country for a time until his debts were settled.

Such was Anastatia's brother, Robert Viscount Rushbrook. When the equipage dashed up in grand style to the front of the mansion, the Viscount tossed the reins to his groom on one side—and tossed the cigar from his mouth on the other: he then stood for a few moments to admire his splendid pair of horses, which were steaming on account of the pace at which he had driven them;—and then he sauntered into the house. Proceeding to the drawing-room, he found Sir Frederick and Anastatia there; and as he had a favour to ask of the former, it was his policy to render himself as agreeable as possible.

“How are you, Sir Frederick?” he exclaimed, proffering his hand, and bestowing a very warm shake therewith, although there was nothing cordial nor servile in the manner of his brother-in-law, but merely as much gentlemanly courtesy as he would have bestowed upon any other guest. “You're looking uncommonly well! And you

"Stasia dear—it is quite an age since I have seen you!"—with which remark the Viscount just touched his sister's cheek with his lips.

"Where have you been all this time?" inquired Lady Anastasia.

"Heaven only knows," responded the Viscount, carelessly; and throwing himself languidly upon a seat, he said, "Pon my soul, Sir Frederick, you are making your place look quite charming. Such taste as you have displayed! Where the deuce you got it all. I can't for the life of me conjecture—buried as you were for so many years——"

"In the midst of that honourable industry," said Sir Frederick Latham; "which has given me the wealth that I now enjoy, and which also had its interval of leisure for the acquirement and the cultivation of that taste which your lordship has just been pleased to eulogize."

There was a certain admixture of pomposity, vanity, and self-complacency in this speech; but yet it was scarcely perceptible, with so much calm composure was it delivered. It likewise conveyed a reproof in an indirect manner—the phrase of "honest industry" irresistibly making the impression of the contrast existing between the pursuits of the great merchant and those of the young lord who had so often been dependent on his bounty. Anastasia felt that impression, though she did not for an instant imagine that her husband had deliberately intended to convey it. As for the Viscount himself, he either did not or chose not to comprehend the allusion; and he said with a characteristic flippancy, "Oh! it's a devilish lucky thing that some men can settle themselves to high stools and awful big books in a dark, dingy counting-house; but hang me, if ever I could have brought my mind to it!"

At this moment the door was thrown open, and a domestic in a superb livery announced that dinner was served up. Nothing occurred during the repast which requires special mention: we will therefore suppose the cloth to have been removed—the dessert to be placed upon the table—Lady Anastasia to have retired to the drawing room—and the brothers-in-law to be left alone together. For some little while Viscount Rushbrook went on drinking, not merely with the air of one who was much attached to

wine, but likewise with that of a person who was priming himself, so to speak, in order to enter upon the subject which, despite his natural self-sufficiency, he had some little diffidence in approaching. He was moreover casting about for an opportunity to enter upon it; and this opportunity Sir Frederick Latham did not appear inclined spontaneously to furnish, not to assist in developing. Indeed, the great merchant seemed as if he had forgotten that part of the Viscount's letter which had alluded to important business: he went on talking on general topics, as if there were no special one to be brought upon the tapis;—one to the young nobleman it was with a most provoking indifference that Sir Frederick told him how long this particular wine had been in bottle, and by what a lucky chance he had got possession of that other sort—and how he intended to make such and such improvements in his grounds—and how much his firm hoped to gain from the great foreign loan which they had just contracted for and taken.

"Confound this fellow!" thought the Viscount within himself: "he is only doing this to humiliate me. He won't help me to come to the point; he means me to open the subject deliberately and methodically, without letting me gradually glide into it! This is the cursed pride of purse, which humbles our patrician pride of birth! By heaven, how I hate him!"

As he mentally made this last ejaculation, Viscount Rushbrook held up a bumper of port towards the brilliant chandelier suspended over head, as if it were to examine its colour; but he was really the while eyeing the merchant askance, and studying his countenance to ascertain whether its expression afforded a hope that the former was presently to solicit—granted. But how inscrutable countenances,—with its cold, half self-sufficient—certain gloss of dignity Frederick knew that the looking at him—but effected the slightest idea of it. He too, all that was passing in mind: but he afforded not the indication that such was the case. length Anastasia's brother fancied himself sufficiently primed—which indeed he must have been, if a couple of bottles of wine could accomplish such priming:

but still he was very far from being intoxicated."

"Oh! by the bye, Sir Frederick," he said, "did you happen to notice that little sentence in my letter where I intimated that I had a matter of importance to submit to you?"

"I did note it," answered the merchant, with business-like precision. "I never fail to observe and I never forget any announcement which appears to be stamped with a serious meaning."

"Oh, well—that's all right!" exclaimed the Viscount. "I was afraid you had lost sight of the thing."

Sir Frederick Latham poured a small quantity of wine into his own glass—for he was habitually temperate: but he said not another syllable in response.

"The fact is," continued the Viscount, first sipping his wine, and then playing with his silver fruit-knife, "I am in a little trouble at this moment—I don't mean *trouble* exactly, because I know that's a term which frightens you City gentleman: but what I mean is that such a thing as a couple of thousand pounds would be of the very greatest service to me. I should know how to use it——"

"No doubt, my lord," said the merchant: everybody knows how to make use of a couple of thousand pounds—especially in these times when no one ought to *mis-use* money."

"Just so," said the Viscount: precisely my ideal!"—and again he filled his glass—again he fidgeted with the silver fruit-knife—while in the depth, of his heart he thought to himself, "Perdition take the cold-blooded fellow! he will make me put the question point blank to him, so that he may have the prideful satisfaction of giving a point-blank *yes*, or the malignant satisfaction of giving as a direct *no*."

"There was a pause, during which Sir Frederick Latham sipped his wine with the most provoking composure; and Viscount Rushbrook grew more and more embarrassed, confused, and annoyed.

"Well, about this little business of mine," he said, at length mustering up his courage anew. "It's only a couple of thousand pounds—I don't exactly know when I can repay it—but of course I would give my bond—and if you, my dear Sir Frederick, would put me in the way of raising it amongst any of your friends——"

"My Lord," interrupted the merchant, with an almost chilling dignity. "I have no money-lenders amongst my friends nor acquaintances—for I never borrow."

"To be sure not!" ejaculated, the Viscount, affecting to laugh: "that would be too ridiculous!—a firm that can lend millions to a foreign Government to borrow at home! No, no!—I didn't mean that! But I was only thinking that perhaps you could put me in the way of raising this modest little sum—for I cannot think of asking you for such a favour, after all that you have at different times done for me——"

Now listen, Lord Rushbrook," interrupted Sir Frederick Latham, settling himself in a business-like manner in his chair, and speaking with a dignified sententiousness. "You want two thousand pounds: and what in more—you want me to give you that money?"

"Give? Oh, no, no!" ejaculated the Viscount. "I mean lend——"

"*Give*, I repeat," continued the merchant, with a slight emphasis on the word: for it was rather his look than his voice which rendered that word impressive when thus reiterated. "Well, my lord, you shall have this amount——"

"My dear Sir Frederick! 'Pon my soul, I hardly know how to express myself! You're a true brother-in-law——"

"And you likewise," added Sir Frederick. "I told your sister so just now in the drawing-room. But I beg that you will listen to me; for it is absolutely necessary we should have some serious conversation——"

"To be sure! This wine's excellent," exclaimed this Viscount; "I could sit and talk over it all night!"

"You will not think it amiss," resumed the merchant, whose lips for a moment expressed mingled contempt and disgust for the reckless dissipated flippancy of the Viscount, "if I enter upon certain recapitulations——"

"Do whatever you like, my dear Sir Frederick," exclaimed Rushbrook, who was now perfectly at his ease in respect to the loan he had asked for, inasmuch as he knew full well that his brother-in-law would faithfully fulfil any promise he had made. "'Pon my soul, this wine's capital!—But I beg your pardon—I was interrupting you! Now then, I'm all attention——By the

bye, hadn't we better have another bottle before we go deeper into serious discourse?"

"Listen to me my lord," said the merchant, somewhat severely, and without heeding the hint relative to the fresh bottle. "It was not I who first sought the acquaintance of the Earl of Fordwich,—nor that of his son the Viscount Rushbrook: but it was a circumstance of a peculiar character—or what other term shall I use?—which made me acquainted with your lordship's family."

"But my dear Sir Frederick," exclaimed the Viscount, now wincing visibly at the merchant's words, which seemed fraught with an allusion that was only too intelligible, "you surely are not going to recapitulate——"

"Yea my lord," said the merchant coldly, "I am going to recapitulate. You ask me a favour: and I will confer it in my own fashion, or else not at all;—then drawing forth a pocket-book, Sir Frederick displayed several blank cheques; and he added, "One of these will I presently fill up for the amount you desire, provided you listen to all that I have to say. But remember! I do not force you; and if you decline to hear me, I replace my cheques in my pocket-book, and there is an end of the matter."

"But my dear Sir Frederick," stammered and faltered the Viscount, "there is something very strange about you this evening. What does it all mean? I scarcely think it is quite generous——"

"Oh! if you take it in that light, my lord," interrupted the merchant, "I can only answer that perhaps it will not be quite prudent for me to comply with your request."

Thus speaking, Sir Frederick Latham made a movement as if to shut up his pocket-book,—when the Viscount, who had the most desperate need of money and would rather hear anything, however unpalatable, than abandon the chance of obtaining it,—hastened to exclaim, "Well, well, Sir Frederick, be it as you will. Proceed! I listen."

"It was between two and three years ago," said the merchant, still with that calm, business-like air which the young nobleman felt to be so provoking, "that a bill for two thousand pounds, purporting to be the acceptance of the Marquis of Swalecliffe—a nobleman well known upon the Turf—and drawn by Viscount

Rushbrook, came in the course of business into the hands of the Firm to which I belong. This bill was a forgery: the Marquis's acceptance was a forged name and Viscount Rushbrook was the forger!"

"Sir Frederick!" moaned Anastasia's brother piteously. "What if any one were listening?"

"No one listens improperly, my lord, in my house," replied the Murchmont.

"Am I to go on?"

"Yes—if you will—I am at your mercy——but this is indeed cruel!"

"It is a fashion which I have of bestowing the favour which is asked of me," rejoined Sir Frederick: and there was something coldly implacable in his tone. "Well the bill came due: it was a forgery, as I have said: the Marquis of Swalecliffe disavowed it; and you, Lord Rushbrook, were stated to be upon the Continent. At all events you were not to be found. Your father came to me in an agony of grief: I took pity on him: he himself could not pay the bill for you—a terrible exposure seemed to be staring you in the face. As for the Marquis,—he was inexorable: he vowed that justice should take its course—and that even though I, the holder of the bill, might arrange the matter with your father, he would expose you all the Clubs—he would brand you as a villain. Then all of a sudden a change came over the Marquis. What influence was brought to bear upon him I know not: but doubtless the intercessions of your father and mother, privately made, prevailed. His lordship agreed that the matter should be hushed up; and I on my part agreed to exchange the forged bill against a note of hand which your father the Earl of Fordwich gave me. I need not add that it was the same—presenting you or your family with thousand pounds; for until this day note of hand remains unpaid."

"Not one syllable of all this he ever denied," said the wretched Viscount, "nor do I deny it now. But where, Sir Frederick——"

"Stop! you have promised to hear me," interrupted the implacable merchant: and he added with a cold sneer "When our discourse is at an end, and, I have filled up the cheque which you require, we will drink another bottle of wine of this very sort which you seem to like so well."

The Viscount's features brightened up in the faintest degree as he saw that the

conversation on this topic must soon draw to an end, and that he would obtain the subsidy of which he stood so much in need.

"The circumstance to which I have referred," continued Sir Frederick Latham, "placed me on a footing of intimacy with your family. I became the husband of your sister; and at the same time I had the supreme honour"—here again he spoke with a cold sneer—"of advancing a few thousands for the benefit of your father. Nor was this all. Shortly after my marriage, you, my lord, became involved in fresh difficulties: you were outlawed for your debts; and every sheriff's officer in London was in search of you. Nay, more—there was one of your creditors, a solicitor, who was also a money-lender that threatened you with an indictment for having obtained from him a loan under the falsest pretences; and again were you obliged to flee to the Continent—or at all events to hide yourself in some secure retreat. And who came forward to succour you? who settled your liabilities? who procured the reversal of the outlawries? who arranged that ugly matter with the usurious solicitor? In a word, who again saved you from ruin—nay, from worse than ruin—from utter degradation and dishonour? It was I, Frederick Latham, the City merchant."

"And did I not express my most grateful thanks?" asked the Viscount: "did I not, alike by letter and by word of mouth, declare that you were my saviour and acknowledge the obligation under which I lay towards you?"

"No doubt," rejoined Sir Frederick. "But letters may be as insincere as bills of exchange themselves may be fictitious: for the man who would forge a name to the latter, would scarcely hesitate to lie through the medium of the former. And then too, as for verbal expressions—Ah! my Lord Viscount Rushbrook, I know the value of such language from *your* lips!"

"Why, what—what—my dear Sir Frederick," stammered the young nobleman looking dreadfully confused, despite his characteristic impudence, what do you mean?"

"Every fable has its moral—every string of truths produces their corollary," replied the merchant, sententiously. "Think you that I have entered this night into all these recapitulations for

the purpose of parading my own generosity in a pecuniary sense towards your father and yourself?—or think you that I seek to enhance the importance of the favour I am about to bestow upon you,—a favour which however great it may be in reference to your present necessities, is in respect to my means and resources of the most trumpery and trivial description. No—these are not my objects! But I wish to let you know, Lord Viscount Rushbrook, that I am not your dupe."

"My dupe? Ha! Sir Frederick, that is really too good!"—and the Viscount affected to laugh chucklingly. "It would be rather difficult, I fancy, to get the better of a shrewd, clear-headed man of business such as you are."

"It is the very thing of which I am seeking to convince you," rejoined Sir Frederick: "for if I give you my money, it is that I toss my thousands to patrician beggars of Belgravia, just as when the humour takes me I toss my pence to the grovelling mendicants of St. Giles's or Whitechapel."

"On my soul, these are hard words, Sir Frederick!" ejaculated the Viscount, colouring.

"Doubtless they are hard words," responded the merchant; but it is your own fault, and that of your father, if they are now addressed to you. I will come to the point. The Earl of Ford—who boasts that his partizan hand has been graciously and condescendingly pleased to grasp my plebeian hand. Such things as these is your Right Honourable father constantly saying; while your Right Honourable mother hesitates not to declare that her daughter was thrown away upon a City merchant, when with a little trouble and manoeuvring she might no doubt have married one of her own sphere. Mark I *one of her own sphere*. It is easy, therefore, to comprehend what your lady-mother thinks of me. But with *you*, my Lord Viscount it is infinitely worse. In your sober moments as well as in your drunken revelries, you have spoken scornfully of the City merchant. Have the words *vain, pompous, sufficient upstart*, never issued from your lips? But I will not dwell upon these things,—though I can assure you they wound me not; for I can scorn and despise them. I have said enough to convince you, my lord, that I am not your dupe. I know that in your heart you hate me: it is

gull and worm-wood for you to receive favours at my hands; and therefore, even in conferring them—and in giving you that which your necessities will not permit you to refuse, but which indeed they compel you to ask—I am revenged!

Nothing could exceed the discomfiture of Viscount Rushbrook while Sir Frederick Latham thus spoke. The patrician dared not look the rich plebeian in the face. He was abashed—confounded—annihilated. But with the utmost coolness Sir Frederick Latham filled up a cheque for the sum of two thousand pounds; and as he passed it across the table to the Viscount, he said, "Not a word of what has passed need be repeated in the presence of Annatitia! And remember, my lord—when we rejoin your sister in the drawing-room, we wear countenances as if nothing extra-ordinary had taken place. And now, my lord, for that other bottle of wine which I promised you."

"Thanks for the accommodation," said the Viscount, now suddenly recovering all his self-possession and his flippant complacency, "But, ah! you have crossed this cheque—and I shall have to send it through my bankers."—whom, to tell you the truth, I have overdrawn to the tune of a few hundreds so that they would intercept a considerable portion of this amount in order to repay themselves—which would by no means answer my purpose."

"Then come to me in the City to-morrow, and I will give you bank-notes," said the merchant. "Or stop, I think I can manage it in another way. Have the goodness to follow me, my lord."

Sir Frederick Latham rose from his seat, and issued from the room. He conducted the Viscount through the library, into a small cabinet, which served as a private office of study where Sir Frederick was wont to look over letters, or transact any other little business which he might manage at home, and on those days on which it was not necessary for him to proceed to his great establishment in the City. Drawing forth a key from his pocket, Sir Frederick opened an iron safe, which was concealed by a door formed in the beautifully paluted and exquisitely gilt pannelling-work; and he took from that safe a cash box containing a quantity of gold in one compartment and a number of bank-notes in another.

"Ah! I see, Sir Frederick," said the Viscount, with one of his flippant laughs, "that you always keep a good supply of money in the house in case of emergencies."

"Always," responded the merchant, with apparent coolness and indifference; but the proceeding was in reality another piece of ostentation on his part, to pique the envy of his patrician brother-in-law, whom he alike despised and hated.

When Sir Frederick had counted down bank-notes to the amount of a couple of thousand pounds, there was still a considerable amount left; and in the same spirit of ostentation, the merchant folded them up methodically—conducting the process in such a manner that Rushbrook might catch a glimpse of the word "HUNDRED" in the corner of some dozen or fifteen of these remaining notes.

"Shall I give you a little memorandum—an acknowledgment—a note of hand—or anything you think fit?" inquired the Viscount, as he trust into his pocket the two thousand pounds just handed to him.

"It is really useless to spoil a good sheet of paper, my lord," was the merchant's coldly contemptuous reply, as he looked up the safe.

The Viscount affected to laugh: but he bit his lip with deep concentrated rage, as he thought within himself, "Insult upon insult! The purse-pride of this upstart plebeian is intolerable!"

While that impression of impotent fury was still upon Rushbrook's countenance, the full gaze of Latham's cold blue eyes was suddenly turned upon him—indeed with an abruptness that made Rushbrook start. But again recovering his self-possession, he ran his fingers through his dark hair,—saying with another laugh, "Now, then, for this bottle which is promised."

Sir Frederick Latham led the way back to the dining-room—rang the bell—and gave the order for the wine. As he sat for another half-hour with the Viscount, his discourse again turned upon general topics; and he spoke precisely as if nothing unpleasant had taken place,—while his demeanour exhibited that courtesy, so coldly polished, which was habitual with him. The fresh supply of wine being finished, the merchant and the Viscount repaired to the drawing-room,—where they parted.

of coffee with Anastasia; and the young lady had not the slightest reason to suspect that anything of a disagreeable character had occurred betwixt her husband and her brother.

It was about eleven o'clock when the Viscount's dashing phaeton was driven round from the stables to the front of the mansion. The night was very dark; and the lamps of the vehicle were lighted. Lord Rushbrook, having taken leave of his sister and his brother-in-law, paused for a few moments in the hall to light a cigar; and he then ascended to the box-seat, receiving the whip and reins from the hands of his groom. He was somewhat the worse for the great quantity of wine which he had drunk; and the domestic, if he had dared, would have remonstrated against his master's undertaking to drive on the occasion: but he knew the Viscount's temper, and accordingly held his peace. His lordship was in rare spirits: he had the two thousand pounds in his pocket—he was elated with wine—he was proud of his beautiful turn-out—and the impression of the disagreeable scene with his brother-in-law having now completely worn off, he said to himself, "Since Latham never refuses his money, I shan't hesitate in future in applying to him even oftener than I have hitherto done."

The equipage dashed along the avenue towards the gates which were thrown open by the porter; and as the steeds flew through that entrance-way, the groom noticed with a shudder how closely the wheel whisked past the iron post. The road upon which they entered, was broad and even: the horses knew that they were returning homeward; and they proceeded at a rapid rate. The equipage had scarcely gone a quarter of a mile from the gate, when on turning a somewhat sharp corner, the phaeton dashed against a post, and was instantaneously overturned.

The groom was stunned, and lay senseless on the road; but as if the adage should be fulfilled which declares "there is a special providence for drunken men and children," the Viscount escaped totally unhurt. He was instantaneously upon his feet; and he fancied that a man, wearing some strange white dress, was at the horses' heads,—to which indeed the stranger had instantaneously rushed, he being on that very spot at the time—so that the

wild progress of the animals was arrested.

"Thank you, my good fellow!" said Rushbrook, shaking himself as he sprang up to his feet. "Just hold on there for a moment while I look to the groom. Ah!" he continued, having examined his dependant, "he is stunned, but not killed. Well! that's lucky. And now for the carriage. Well, by heaven! this is lucky again! Nothing broken that I can see, except the lamps. I think those horses will stand now. Just come and lend me a hand to set the phaeton upright."

The man to whom these words were addressed, did not give utterance to a syllable in reply: but still he appeared to comprehend what was said; for having patted the horses' neck he approached the Viscount.

"Why, you are a Lascar—or a Chinaman—or a Malay—or something of the sort?" exclaimed Rushbrook, as the man emerged from the comparative obscurity: for the lights of both the lamps were extinguished—there were no gas lamps in that part of the road—nor was there any horse near. "Why the deuce don't you speak. You seem to understand me."

The Lascar made a sign that he was dumb; but he at once addressed himself to the business of raising the phaeton,—which he did in a very few moments by his own unaided strength. The groom was now recovering; and the Lascar, lifting the man in his powerful arms, placed him in the vehicle.

"You are a very useful fellow," said the Viscount; "and I can't think of giving you less than five shillings for your services."

Thus speaking, the nobleman thrust his hand into his breeches' pocket; and with that carelessness which was partially characteristic, and partially the result of his inebriate condition, he pulled forth all the contents of that pocket—gold, silver, and bank notes. Quick as lightning the Lascar seized upon the notes: it was one rapid clutch which he made at them; and the next instant he was darting away as quick as his legs could carry him.

"Stop thief!" vociferated the Viscount, wild with rage and fury; but even before his voice had ceased to vibrate in the air, the white garments of the robber were lost in the darkness of the night.

A terrible execration burst from Rushbrook's lips: but he dared not speed in pursuit. In the first place, he was a coward: ideas of daggers and knives connected with that Lascar, swept through his brain; and in the second place, he dared not quit the equipage. His hasty ejaculations startled the groom almost completely back into life; and he said, "What is the matter, my lord?"

Rushbrook was on the very point of proclaiming the extent to which he had been robbed,—when it struck him that if he were to do so, he must inevitably cut the figure of the vilest dastard in the eyes of his dependant, for not having at once pursued the plunderer. Thus, though almost maddened with vexation, his pride nevertheless inspired him with sufficient self-possession to make him hold his peace on that score; and he exclaimed, "Oh, it was nothing! Only the strange manner in which that fellow darted away after I had given him a few shillings."

The groom's thoughts were still too much in confusion for him to perceive at the moment that there was something strange in the business, and that his master was speaking evasively. When he subsequently reflected upon it, it was too late to put any further questions.

Rushbrook now inquired if the groom were very much hurt? The man responded that he was considerably shaken; but he congratulated himself on having broken no bones. The Viscount resumed his seat: but he drove very cautiously for the remainder of the journey; and all the way homeward to his father's residence in Park Lane, he never ceased inwardly cursing his ill luck, which had deprived him of a sum that was so much needed by existing circumstances.

CHAPTER CXXII.

THE BRILLIANT ENTERTAINMENT.

FOUR or five days elapsed after the incidents which we have been describing; and Lady Anastasia Latham knew not precisely what course to adopt in respect to Madame Angelique. She had promised Shadbolt at the time to call upon her: but the pledge was hastily

given, for the purpose of getting rid of the man; and afterwards Anastasia did not like to fulfil it. Equally distasteful to her was the idea of writing to Madame Angelique upon the subject of the claim made upon her; and thus these four or five days had passed away without anything being done. A grand entertainment was now about to be given at Tudor Lodge and this was for the moment engrossing her ladyship's attention.

"You will see to-night a very interesting young couple," said Sir Frederick Latham to Anastasia, as they were seated together at breakfast on the morning of the day on which the entertainment was to be given.

"A young married couple?" said Anastasia inquiringly.

"No—brother and sister," responded her husband; "and they are twins. Their name is Ashton; and as if all circumstances should combine to augment the interest which envelopes them, they bear the names of Christian and Christina."

"Perhaps it was a mother's pious love which bestowed these names upon her twin-offspring?" said Lady Anastasia.

"I do not know the circumstances," answered Sir Frederick Latham; but I will tell you how it is that Mr. and Miss Ashton are to be our guests this evening, and wherefore I am about to ask you, Anastasia, to show them all possible attention."

"You know full well, Sir Frederick," responded the amiable wife, "that no expressed wish of yours is ever wilfully neglected by me. I will show Mr. and Miss Ashton every attention—not merely because you desire it—nor because mere ordinary courtesy would have prompted such conduct on my part—but likewise because I am already interested in this young brother and sister."

"I was about to give you some little explanation," resumed Sir Frederick. "There has been for a while past an Indian lady of rank staying in the British metropolis—but maintaining a strict *incognita*. By the death of her father she has recently attained a still higher rank; and large funds have been remitted to England for her use. These moneys were paid through our correspondent's house at Calcutta; and it yesterday became necessary that I should see the lady of whom I am speaking, at her residence in the district of Bayewater. There I met Mr."

Miss Ashton, as well as a gentleman of the name of Redcliffe. Having received the lady's instructions, in respect to the large funds which our firm holds on her account, I ventured to him that if it were agreeable, you Anastatia, would call and pay your respects. The lady expressed her thanks, and with much courtesy gave me to understand that she was desirous of living in seclusion during her sojourn in this country. But she remarked that she by no means wished to condemn her beloved friend Miss Ashton to a similar monotony of existence: for it appears that Miss Ashton resides altogether with the Indian lady—while Mr. Ashton and Mr. Redcliffe were only the temporary visitors of a few hours. To be brief, I succeeded in inducing Mr. and Miss Ashton to accept an invitation to our entertainment this evening; and you may therefore expect them."

Sir Frederick Latham, an Indora's financial agent, had necessarily been made acquainted with her queenly rank: but as the matter was a secret, he—with the characteristic caution of business-habits—forbore from revealing the truth even to his own wife. He had striven hard to induce Indora to visit at his house. He had calculated that if she would only make her appearance for an hour in his brilliant saloons, the presence of a lady of such matchless beauty—even though her Sovereign rank should still remain concealed—would give an immense *clat* to the entertainment. But Indora had declined,—not merely for the reason which she had alleged, but likewise she deemed it her duty to bestow as much attention as possible upon the wounded Sagoonah. She nevertheless urged Christina to accept the invitation: while Mr. Redcliffe had by a sign intimated to Christina that he also was to respond in the affirmative. Thus, although Sir Frederick had failed to obtain the presence of Queen Indora at his mansion, he had nevertheless succeeded in respect to the young brother and sister, whose personal beauty was of so exceedingly interesting a character, and who could not therefore fail to create a sensation. But Sir Frederick did not choose to enter into these full explanations with his wife, Lady Anastatia: he never suffered her to perceive the amount of pains he took to render his entertainments so brilliant, attractive, and varied, that they should

even excite the envy of the patrician guests who might be present at them.

At about nine o'clock in the evening there was a continuous line of carriage rolling along the avenue of Sir Frederick's grounds, and setting down the fashionably appolloed guests at the mansion. The edifice itself was a perfect blaze of light; and all the arrangements were upon a scale which denoted an utter disregard for expense. Sir Frederick was indeed immensely rich; and the sum of money which such an entertainment as this might cost him, was an insignificant outlay when considered in reference to his means. The brilliant saloons were soon crowded with guests, amongst whom were what might be termed, the aristocracy of the commercial world as well as a considerable assemblage of members of the patrician aristocracy itself.

Lord and Lady Fordwich were prevented by indisposition from appearing at this entertainment; but Viscount Rushbrook was there. This nobleman had for the last few days been revolving in his mind a thousand pretexts for making another draw upon the merchant's purse; but he had as yet failed to hit upon any plan which might reasonably account for an application following so close on the heels of the former one. Nevertheless, it was absolutely necessary for the Viscount to obtain fifteen hundred or a thousand pounds with the shortest possible delay; for not being himself a Peer, nor even a Member of the House of Commons, he was unprotected against arrest; and he knew that there was a warrant out for his apprehension on account of an unpaid bond which had just fallen due. To be incarcerated would prove his ruin: it would bring all his difficulties to the climax: his creditors—most of whom were now kept quiet by promises, or else were ignorant that he was in London—would flock around him like a nest of hornets. The reader will therefore comprehend that it was a matter of the most vital importance for Lord Rushbrook to procure without delay the wherewith to satisfy the creditor who sought to plunge him into prison.

He knew full well that although Anastatia was supplied with ample means for all her current expenses—and that though she might let him have (as indeed she had frequently done)

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ndred pounds—it was totally useless ask her to furnish from her own purse a much larger amount than he needed. dared, not explain to his brother-in-law the precise truth of the adventure with the false Lascar; because he knew perfectly well that not for a single minute would Sir Frederick Latham put forth in such a tale—but that on the contrary he would be sure to regard it as the most shallow and impudent pretext for obtaining an additional supply of money. What course was the account to adopt? He knew not: he was as cruelly bewildered—he was miserably perplexed: he had no heart for the enjoyment of the festivities to which he had come; but he had made his appearance at Tudor Lodge in the hope that some chapter of accidents might evolve some circumstance which he could possibly turn to his advantage. Thus, if, for instance, he should find his brother-in-law in a better mood towards him than usual—if the gratified vanity of beholding a grand entertainment prove most brilliantly successful, should open the heart of the City merchant,—or again, if it were possible to induce Anastasia to load on his behalf, devising some pretext for the plea itself—Lord Rushbrook was determined to be ready to take advantage of any such favourable incident.

Amongst the equipages which rolled up to the entrance of Tudor House, was the carriage of Queen Indora; and this contained Christian and Christina. The moment they entered the brilliantly lighted saloon, Sir Frederick Latham led his wife forward to greet the twins with a fitting welcome; and the amiable Anastasia, already predisposed to like them, who at once smitten with the conviction that her sympathies had flowed in a channel which would yield no future cause for regret. There was something so exceedingly interesting, even pathetically touching, in the appearance of this brother and sister—such a striking similitude between them and their personal beauty was of so high and intellectual an order,—that it was impossible for any one who had a heart susceptible of right and proper feeling to be otherwise than moved towards this young pair. Though their manners were naturally retired and unobtrusive, yet had they gentility's perfect gloss: every gesture denoted good breeding: and there was an elegance as well as a

refinement about them which would have led a stranger to believe that they were the offspring of one of the highest families in the land. Christian leant upon her brother's arm,—her beautiful shape set off by a costume which was characterized by tasteful elegance; and though she had received costly gifts from Queen Indora and from Mr. Redcliffe, yet did she now wear little jewellery, not because she herself egotistically appreciated the poetical aphorism which says that "beauty when unadorned is adorned the most,"—but because her taste in this respect was naturally simple. Her raven hair flowed in heavy tresses upon her polished, stainless shoulders; and as this was the first time she had ever made her appearance in so large and brilliant an assemblage, there was a certain flutter in her heart, which gave a carnation hue to her beauty not merely interesting, but likewise brilliant at the moment.

Her brother Christian certainly never appeared to greater advantage. The evening costume which he wore—the black dress coat and pantaloons, with the snowy white waistcoat—set off the slender symmetry of his shape; and his dark hair, parted in natural curls above his high open forehead, enframed as it were that seat of the loftiest thoughts. No wonder therefore that this beautiful young couple—for the word *beautiful* is not misused even in reference to the masculine good looks of our young hero himself—should have created a considerable sensation when they entered the saloon. Sir Frederick Latham perceived the effect thus produced: he saw that the young pair had in a moment become the cynosure of attraction; and though he outwardly betrayed not what he felt, yet did he inwardly congratulate himself on the policy which had induced him to invite Christian and Christina to his entertainment.

After Sir Frederick and Lady Anastasia Latham had conversed for a little while with Mr. and Miss Ashton, the dancing commenced. Sir Frederick requested Christian to open the ball with her ladyship,—thus doing every thing he could to put our hero forward as his principal male guest. He himself never danced: but Viscount Rushbrook became Christina's partner for the first quadrille.

This first quadrille was just drawing to a close, when Christina, on glancing

towards the extremity of the room, caught a glimpse of a countenance which brought the warm blood up to her cheeks, but the next instant that colour vanished—and for a few moments she was exceedingly pale. This transitory display of emotion on her part however passed unnoticed; and the dance being over, the Viscount conducted her to a seat. He remained conversing with her for a few minutes longer; and then, as her brother rejoined her the nobleman retired to another part of the room. Sir Frederick Latham almost immediately came up to discourse with the twins; and soon did the splendid band give notice that the next dance was about to commence. Christian was introduced to some young lady of rank for this second quadrille: and scarcely had he quitted Christina's side, when a well known voice, speaking low and tremulously, said, "May I have the pleasure of Miss Ashton's hand on the present occasion?"

All the proper pride, modesty, and self possession of the young lady immediately came to her aid, as she rose from her seat and gave her hand to Lord Octavian Meredith: for he it was of whose countenance she had caught a glimpse, as ere now stated, amidst the lookers—on at the farther extremity of the brilliantly lighted saloon. A sense of duty, having several phases—duty towards herself—duty towards this young nobleman who was the husband of another—duty towards that other, the amiable Zoe, who was Christina's friend—inspired the young maiden with a degree of firmness which made her heart glow with satisfaction at the thought that she should be enabled to command it. No change took place in her countenance; her hand trembled not as it rested in that of Lord Octavian;—yet *his* hand trembled—and she felt that it did so. For a moment her looks had encountered his own when she rose from her seat to give him that hand: but as she led her to the place which they were to take in the dance, she looked straight forward, yet without having any visible air of embarrassment or restraint. Nevertheless, although to every one else Christina's aspect and bearing were devoid of aught to create any particular attention—yet Lord Octavian felt as if his heart were riven with a pang for to him this calm firmness appeared a proof of indifference. He said not a word for

several minutes after he had invited her to dance with him: but still he had sufficient presence of mind to avoid betraying by his looks the feelings which were agitating in his breast.

"Little did I expect the pleasure of encountering you here," he presently said; and again his voice was low and tremulous. "I have mingled but little in society lately—I came hither to night to distract my mind as it were from the thoughts which are ever agitating it—"

"May I inquire," asked Christina, "if your lordship has lately heard——"

"From Zoe? Yes;"—and he heaved a profound sigh. "I see that your brother is here," he immediately added, evidently for the purpose of changing the topic.

The circumstances of the dance suddenly interrupted the discourse, and when the figure was ended, Lord Octavian was evidently too much embarrassed to know how to resume the conversation. Christina therefore began to speak on indifferent topics: but her position was growing more and more embarrassing and painful; for by a kind of intuitive knowledge she comprehended what Meredith himself felt.

"Is it possible, Christina," he presently said, in a low deep voice, "that I have become an object of utter indifference towards you? You are scarcely courteous towards me—your manner is absolutely chilling——"

"I am incapable of behaving with a wilful deficiency of courtesy," replied Christina: but there was something in the quick look which she flung upon the young nobleman, which seemed to imply, that if she did not absolutely resent, yet she at least deprecated his calling her by her Christian name.

"But why thus cold towards me?" he asked; "why thus freezing? Surely I have not offended you?"

"No, my lord—you have not offended me," she answered. "But may I beg that you will cease these reproaches?"

Again did the circumstances of the dance interrupt the discourse; and when it was renewed, Christina talked in a manner which as plainly as possible forbade any recurrence to that which she evidently regarded as forbidden ground.

"May I expect the pleasure of dancing again with you this evening?" he inquired in a tone of earnest appeal, as he conducted her back to her seat.

"I beg your lordship to excuse me," replied Christina: and the response was given with a firmness which again sent a pang through Meredith's heart.

"But this is most unkind!" he said, almost passionately, though in a very low voice. "At least we are friends? You do not answer me!"—and then, after a moment's pause, he added, "Christina, you will derive me to despair!"

"One word, my lord!" rejoined the young maiden firmly. "I cannot be guilty of so much ridiculous affection as to pretend to be ignorant of these allusions: but I beseech your lordship to understand that I shall regard your conduct in the light of a persecution if you persist in it."

Having thus spoken, Christina rose from the seat to which she had been conducted, and proceeded to join Lady Anastatia, who was now conversing with Christian and two or three others on the opposite side of the apartment. In one sense it cost Christina a severe pang to behave in this manner towards Lord Octavian: but in another sense she was rejoiced—yes, absolutely rejoiced—because she felt that she had done her duty, and there was a glowing approval within the region of her own conscience. As for Lord Octavian himself, nothing could exceed the distress of mind that he experienced—although he had sufficient fortitude to avoid the outward betrayal thereof. Issuing from the saloon, he went forth upon the landing, to obtain if possible a less heated atmosphere; for his brows were fevered and were throbbing violently. He passed on into the refreshment-room, where he obtained some cooling beverage; and thence he entered a conservatory, where he found himself completely alone. Here he gave way to his reflections.

Lady Anastatia Latham was conversing with some of her guests, as already stated, when a footman drawing near to the group, hovered a few moments about it, in such a manner as to indicate that he wished to speak to his mistress. She moved away from her friends; and he said to her, "Please your ladyship, there is that person—Mr. Shadbolt—who has called again and requests a few minutes' interview."

"Did you not tell him that I was particularly engaged?" asked Anastatia, the colour for an instant rushing to her cheeks.

"I did, my lady," replied the domestic: "but, to tell your ladyship the truth, he insists——"

"Enough!" interrupted Anastatia: and then, with regained self-possession, she added, "Yes, the business is of importance. I will speak to him. Where is he?"

"I showed him into the breakfast parlour, my lady," answered the footman: "for, to tell your ladyship the truth," added the man, with an air of concern, "he is the worse for liquor—and I scarcely dared venture to bring his message to your ladyship."

Anastatia moved hastily away: she felt humiliated in the presence of her servant. There was something degrading in the idea that she should be asked for by a person who came in a state of intoxication, and that she should not dare bid the domestic turn him away from the house. She was considerably agitated—though outwardly this excitement was scarcely visible to the crowd of guests amongst whom she passed on her way towards the door of the ball-room. She issued forth—descended the stairs—and proceeded to the breakfast-parlour.

Now, it happened that Sir Frederick Latham was standing at a little distance from the spot where that rapid conversation had taken place between Anastatia and the domestic. He had seen the servant hover about the group in order to gain speech with Anastatia; and he had marked that glow which had crimsoned her countenance. He naturally concluded that something wrong had occurred in the household arrangements, and that something might suddenly have been discovered to be defective with reference to the splendid supper which was to be spread in the banqueting-room. He therefore beckoned the footman forth upon the landing; and he said, "What has occurred to annoy her ladyship?"

For an instant the man looked confused, and seemed as if he would rather not have been questioned; but as at a second glance towards his master's countenance, he caught the gaze of the merchant's cold blue eyes fixed steadfastly and searchingly upon him, he

stammered out, "It is nothing particular, sir—only a person who has called on some little business——"

"Called on business at such an hour and on such an occasion!" said the merchant. "Who is this person?"

"The same, sir," was the footman's response, "who called the other day, when you questioned me——"

"Ah! the person who gave the name of Shadbolt?" said Sir Frederick: and though his countenance continued coldly impassive, yet was his mind inwardly troubled: for he had not forgotten the confusion shown by his wife immediately after that former visit of Shadbolt's, and which indeed had led him to question the footman as to who the individual was. "And on what plea did this person solicit an interview at such an hour?" he asked.

Again the domestic looked confused: again did he meet the cold steady searching gaze of his master; and thinking he had better tell whatsoever he knew, he said, "I informed this Mr. Shadbolt that there was a large party at the house, and that her ladyship was particularly engaged: but he insisted upon seeing her ladyship—and in short, Sir, he said it was something about a debt for which he had to claim payment."

Now did all the proud blood of the City merchant rush to his cheeks: his lips quivered—his eyes glistened—he even made a gesture of rage; and for that one instant he betrayed more emotion in the presence of his domestic than he had ever before done. But in another instant it had passed; and in a voice that was perfectly cold and firm, he said, "Do you know to whom this debt is due, or what is its amount?"

"No, sir," replied the footman. "Mr. Shadbolt said nothing upon these points; and it appeared to me that when he did let drop something about a debt which he had to claim, it slipped out inadvertently—because, sir, to tell you the truth, the man is the worse for liquor."

Again did the blood rush to the merchant's countenance: he too felt humiliated, as his wife had ere now done, that such a thing should become known to the menials of the household: but again quickly recovering himself, he said, "This must be some mistake: It is impossible her ladyship can owe any money. However, you

will do well to keep your own counsel upon the point:"—and Sir Frederick placed a couple of guineas in the servant's hand.

The man bowed, and was about to retire, when his master said, "Go and tell your mistress that I wish to speak to her for a moment in my private room; and let this Shadbolt wait until after I have thus spoken to her ladyship."

He must now return to Anastatia herself. She had repaired to the breakfast-parlour, where Mr. Shadbolt awaited her presence. He had partaken somewhat copiously of wine—and haply of spirits likewise, after his dinner; and though very far from being completely intoxicated, he was nevertheless considerably elevated. He rose from his seat as Lady Anastatia, in her elegant ball-room apparel, made her appearance: but he had the air of one who was doggedly resolute in carrying out the point he had in view.

"What means this intrusion at such an hour and on such an occasion!" asked Anastatia, with mingled indignation and trepidation.

"Why, your ladyship did not keep your word," responded Shadbolt: "and therefore I thought there was no necessity to stand on niceties in this little matter."

"I will communicate with Madame Angellique to-morrow," replied Anastatia, with glowing cheeks. "I could not do so before."

"But your ladyship may forget when to-morrow comes, as you have done for the last few days—and therefore," added Shadbolt resolutely, "we had better settle the business off-hand."

"The demand is a mistake," she responded "and I can easily satisfy Madame Angellique that it is so."

"And Madame Angellique says over and over again that it is no mistake whatsoever. 'Come, my lady—you had better pay the money at once, and avoid all unpleasantness. To be plain with you, Madame Angellique is determined to have it: and her resolution is represented in your ladyship's humble servant, honest Ike Shadbolt.'"

It was now for the first time that a suspicion of intended extortion flashed to the mind of Lady Anastatia Latham. The blood ran cold to her heart—the next instant it coursed like molten lead

in its crimson channels. She knew not how to treat the matter whether to repel the demand with indignation, or to submit to it and promise the money for the morrow. At that instant the door opened: and the footman entering, said, "If you please, my lady, Sir Frederick wishes to speak to you a moment in his study."

Anastatia was for an instant smitten as if by dismay at this announcement; and she was on the point of asking the domestic some question, when he said, "And perhaps, my lady, Mr. Shadbolt had better remain until your ladyship comes back to him."

Without a word Anastatia issued from the room: but when in the hall she put to the footman the question to which she had a few instants back been on the point of giving utterance.

"What does Sir Frederick want me for?" she asked, as if with an air of indifference.

"Sir Frederick questioned me, my lady," responded the footman: "and to tell your ladyship the truth, I was compelled to inform him that Mr. Shadbolt had called for payment of some little debt——"

"Ah!—then Mr. Shadbolt himself must have spoken to you?" said Anastatia; and it was with the utmost difficulty she could maintain an air of composure.

"He only told me that much, my lady was the lacquey's response. "I could not help answering Sir Frederick——"

"Certainly not!" interjected Anastatia, with an air of dignified self-possession. "It was your duty."

Lady Anastatia Latham then proceeded direct to her husband's study, with the determination, if needed of making a certain confession: but it was with a sense of dismay that she adopted the resolve. She entered the study—where she found her husband seated at the desk, and reading a letter with his wonted demeanour of imperturbable calmness.

"My dear Anastatia," he said rising from his seat and advancing towards her, "it has perhaps been a little oversight on my part that I have not occasionally given you the key of this safe in order that you may replenish your purse without the necessity of applying direct to me. Here is the key: you can restore it to me presently. And

now, my dear Anastatia, delay not in returning amongst your guests."

Having thus spoken, with an unusual appearance and kindness Sir Frederick at once issued from the room. The whole proceeding was so completely different from what Anastatia had expected, that she was rendered absolutely speechless, and could not even murmur a syllable of acknowledgment for her husband's generosity. When the door closed behind him, and she found herself alone, tears began trickling down her cheeks. She comprehended it all.

"Yes," she said within herself, "he suspects that I am in debt—that I have been extravagant—that I have concealed my embarrassments from him; and he adopts this nobly generous course for a twofold reason. He affords me the opportunity of acquitting myself of my supposed liabilities; and at the same time he conveys a reproof for the mingled extravagance and dissimulation of which he deems me guilty. Oh, it is painful to be thus wrongly judged!—but on the other hand, infinite is the relief which I experience at not being compelled to confess everything! I understand him well. He will speak no more upon the subject: he will not ask me who are my supposed creditors: he doubtless thinks within himself that, touched by his generosity and goodness, I shall abstain from extravagance for the future. And I who have not been extravagant at all!—I who have even been enabled to assist my brother from the liberal sums which my husband has placed at my disposal!"

To this effect were the thoughts which swept rapidly through the mind of Lady Anastatia Latham: and drying her tears, she hastened to open the safe. But she paused ere she took forth the cash-books: she made a strong effort to conjure up her moral courage; and she said to herself, "What if I were now to defy these extortioners?"

But the moral courage came not in sufficient force to nerve her to that extent. She dreaded an explosion of Shadbolt's brutal rage: he might create a scene which would be fraught with a terrific exposure at a moment when the mansion was crowded with guests. She felt her own weakness; and with a profound sigh she drew forth the cash-box. There was a quantity of gold—on one side—a layer of bank-notes—on

CHAPTER CXXIII.

THE SAFE AND THE CASH-BOX.

other. She took forth sufficient for the liquidation of Madame Angelique's extortionate demand; and restoring the cash-box to its place, she locked the massive door of the safe,—thrusting the key into the bosom of her dress.

Lady Anastatia then returned to Mr. Shadbolt: and with dignified demeanour, she said, "Remember, I totally deny the claim which is made upon me: but I do not wish to have any dispute for such a sum. Here therefore is the amount. Of course you are provided with a receipt?"

"Here it is, my lady," answered Shadbolt, infinitely rejoiced at the success of his villainous scheme: and at the same time he drew forth the receipt from his pocket.

Anastatia examined it; and perceiving that it was an acquittance in full of all demands, signed with the ex-milliner's own name, she was satisfied Shadbolt took his departure with the money in his pocket; and Anastatia returned to the ball-room. It happened that at the moment of her entrance Sir Frederick was passing near that door; she flung upon him a look full of gratitude,—at the same time laying her hand gently upon his arm, and saying, "You have this night done something which I can never, never forget! Here is the key of the safe:"—and he raised her hand to her bosom to take it thence.

"Not another syllable upon the subject, Anastatia!" responded the merchant: "and as for the key, keep it until to-morrow. We shall be observed!"

He at once walked away to another part of the room; while Anastatia—who was deeply affected, though she outwardly betrayed it not—repaired to a seat at a distance.

Neither the merchant nor herself had noticed that brother, Viscount Rushbrook, had been close by at the instant this exchange of a few words took place; and we may add that his quick ear had caught these few syllables which related to the key of the safe.

ANASTATIA repaired, as we have said, to a seat at the farther extremity of the room; and her brother the Viscount, after reflecting for a few moments, lounged round the apartment in order to join her there. He was revolving in his mind how to break to his sister the particular subject of his difficulties, when Christian and Christina approached. Anastatia's countenance immediately brightened up; and she spoke to the twins with as much cordiality as if they were longstanding friends instead of the mere acquaintances of this particular evening. The Viscount joined in the discourse as a pretext for keeping near his sister: but he wished in his heart that Christian and Christina would move away to another part of the room. It happened that while Anastatia was thus talking she mechanically arranged the body of her dress—or rather the face which trimmed it; and the little key fell from her bosom. It alighted on the flowing skirt of her apparel, and thus did not fall at once upon the floor, whence the carpet had been taken up for the sake of the dancers. The Viscount who was lounging against a table behind his sister's chair, noticed that the key thus fell: the incident was however unperceived by Lady Anastatia as well as by the twins. For a few minutes Lord Rushbrook suffered the key to remain where it was, in order to ascertain whether his sister would immediately miss it: but finding that she did not, he dropped his handkerchief as if quite accidentally. Picking it up again, he took up the key with it: for he had so managed the fall of the handkerchief that it alighted immediately over the key itself.

Another dance was now about to commence. Lady Anastatia, rising from her seat, hastened to introduce Christian to a partner; while some young scion of the aristocracy engaged Christina's hand for that quadrille. Lord Rushbrook was now at liberty to act according to the evil promptings of his own unprincipled mind. He felt tolerably well assured that he possessed the key of the safe. In the first place, he thought that he recollected it, as it was a key of peculiar construction; and in the second place, the

word which he had overheard his sister hastily whisper to her husband, strengthened the belief that he held in the possession the means of supplying his necessities. As for compunction, he had none: his only thought now was how to achieve his object without being observed or interrupted.

He sauntered through the rooms with fashionable lounging air; he passed out upon the landing; and watching a favourable opportunity, he glided down the stairs. On reaching the hall, accident again served his disreputable purpose; for it happened that none of the domestics were within view at the moment. In less than a minute the Viscount was in his brother-in-law's study, where the light had been left burning after Anastasia's brief interview with her husband there. To open the safe and take out the cash box was now the work of an instant. A hasty glance at the contents of the box showed the Viscount that they must consist of at least fifteen or sixteen hundred pounds, and he scoured every golden coin and every bank-note about his own person.

On closing the safe—to which he of course returned the cash-box—he happened to glance towards the window, the blind of which was not pulled down; and at that very same moment it struck the nobleman that a human countenance was withdrawn. Yes—a human countenance which had evidently been looking upon him, and which had observed this act of robbery—unless indeed it were a delusion—a phantom conjured up by his own guilty conscience at the instant Rushbrook felt the blood congeal into ice in his veins: he could not have been more dismayed of his brother-in-law had suddenly made his appearance—or if a police-constable had that moment placed a hand upon his shoulder. For several instants he stood completely transfixed; and then he rushed to the window. It was a moonlight night: the window looked upon a grass plot at the side of the house; no human being was to be seen—no gliding figure amongst the trees. Still there was ample time during the Viscount's consternation for any individual to disappear round the angle of the building; and thus because he saw no one he dared not come to the conclusion that no one had looked into the study.

Rushbrook was irresolute how to act. Should he return the notes and gold to

the cash-box and drop the key somewhere? or should he keep his plunder and run every risk? Prudence suggested the former course—his dire necessities commanded the latter; so that at length with that recklessness, half slipshod, half desperate, which characterizes unscrupulous individuals in certain circumstances—he said to himself, "Well, at all risks I will keep the money!"

He stole forth unperceived from the study, and reascended to the ball room. Here, still unobserved, he dropped the key near the very chair in which Anastasia had been seated when it glided down from the bosom of her dress. He continued to lounge about the rooms: but there was a presentiment of evil floating in his mind: the possession of the money did not contribute to his happiness, nor relieve him from the apprehension that the mode in which it had come into his hands might be discovered. As for the countenance itself, he had no definite idea of it: he had no sooner caught a glimpse of it than it was gone: as soon as seen, it vanished. Yet that he had really beheld that countenance, he could not conceal from himself: he dared not flatter his mind that it was a mere delusion.

Christina danced the quadrille with the young scion of the aristocracy; and when it was over she was conducted back to a seat. Scarcely had her late partner quitted her side, than Lord Octavian Meredith rejoined her. He looked pale: but still there was a certain expression of decisiveness in his regards and on his lips which immediately struck Christina—for an instant even alarming her; for he had on this night repeated that which he had said to her before—namely, that she would drive him to despair.

"Will you favour me with a few minutes' conversation somewhere?" he asked, in a voice which though low, sounded strange and even unnatural, as if the speaker were under the influence of feelings tensely wrung—painfully wrought up.

"For what purpose, my lord?" asked our young heroine; and there was a tremulousness in her own voice.

"Not to repeat anything which you may not hear," he quickly responded.

"My mind is made up! The resolution I have adopted will, I know, afford you satisfaction"—he paused, and added "perhaps pleasure!"

Christina hesitated for an instant; and then—self-reliant, conscious that she had the power to perform her duty as she had already performed it an hour and a half back on this same evening—she said, “Yes, my lord—I will grant you a few minutes private conversation, if you know where we can have it.”

She took his arm; and he said not another word as he led her forth from the ball-room to the refreshment-room where several other ladies and gentlemen were assembled; and two or three were at the time returning from the conservatory, which opened from that apartment. Into this conservatory Meredith led Christina; and we should observe that it was lighted with lamps—for it had been thrown open in order that the guests might admire the choice exotics, the fruit trees, and the flower, which from tropical climes had been transferred thither.

Octavian and Christina were now alone together in the conservatory; and the young maiden, gently disengaging her hand from her companion's arm, glanced for a moment at his countenance, as much as to inquire for what purpose she had been brought hither and what he had to communicate.

“Christina,” he said, “I have profited by your own noble example. I will not tell you how much I love you—because—because—I have promised that nothing now shall flow from my lips to which you may not listen. Just now I felt as if there were despair in my heart! I came hither—I reflected by myself—I comprehended you—I knew why you seemed cold to me! It was your duty which you were performing. Ah! and you have awakened me to a sense of mine! Yes! my resolve is taken: every sacrifice shall be made for her who /as made, and is still making, such immense sacrifice for me! will not be outdone in generosity—in magnanimity. Christina,” he added, in a voice which was tremulous, and so low as to be scarcely audible, “I leave England to-morrow—I set out to rejoin Zoo!”

“Lord Octavian,” replied Christina scarcely able to keep back the tears which ineffable emotions sent up to the very brims of her eyelids—“you are performing the noblest part—you are taking the most generous course which you could possibly adopt—and heaven will bless you!”

“Alas! Christina,” said Meredith, in a low deep voice, as before, “happiness and duty do not always go hand in hand!”

“Yes—you will be happy, Lord Octavian!” replied Christina, impressively; “because your conscience will tell you that you are acting rightly—and because heaven, which ever succours good intentions, will give you strength to perform your duties thus! You will go to the amiable Zoo—you will rejoin her—you know how deeply and fondly she loves you——”

“Enough, Christina!” interrupted Octavian, now with a gust of vehemence; “speak not thus, or you will deter me from my purpose!”

“Heaven forbid!” cried the young maiden, emphatically. “My lord in Zoo's name I thank you for this noble resolve that you have adopted. And now let us retire hence.”

“What! not another word before we separate, Christina?” said Octavian, again speaking passionately: “no word of hope—no word of promise——”

“My lord,” she interrupted him—and it was now with a certain friendliness of manner, blending with true maidenly dignity,—“you have resolved upon a good deed; you are at length doing an act of justice: for heaven's sake mar it not by any weakness or folly now! Let us at once retire, my lord—And if you need one word—let me bid you rest assured that you shall have my prayers for the welfare and the happiness of yourself and your amiable wife!”

“Christina, you are an angel!” exclaimed Meredith: “you inspire me with courage to do my duty! And belive me it shall be performed!”

Without another word, Lord Octavian gave his arm to Christina, and led her forth from the conservatory. She glanced furtively at his countenance, and perceived that it now had a certain flush upon it—a certain animation, as if arising from the heart's satisfaction at a strongly adopted resolve to perform a sacred, solemn duty. Christina herself was not unhappy; no she was happy: for perhaps stronger still in her mind was the sense of duty; and the self-martyring heart, when truly pure and virtuous, experiences a bliss in its own sacrifices. They returned to the ball-room; and there Octavian immediately quitted Christina's side. Encountering her brother, he shook

the youth warmly by the hand, and hold him in discourse for a few minutes,—he himself now conversing with a manly calmness and self-possession. Christina subsequently explained to her brother everything that had passed.

Meanwhile Lady Anastatia Latham, both thinking herself of the key of the safe, determined to place it in some drawer or secure nook until she should have an opportunity of restoring it to her husband. She felt for it in her dress: but it was gone. For a few moments she was frightened: she thought she must have left it in the lock of the safe: then she remembered that she felt it in her bosom when about to give it back to Sir Frederick; and next she recalled to mind the circumstances that he had arranged the lace upon the orange of her dress when seated at the extremity of the room. Thither she repaired: and she found it lying upon the quaintly chalked floor, close by that chair in which she had sat. She now placed the key in one of the mantel-ornaments,—little suspecting however for what purpose it had served during the interval that it was lost from her possession.

At one o'clock in the morning the supper-room was thrown open; and a splendid banquet was given. We however pass over all details of the festive scene, inasmuch as therewith no incident is connected requiring special mention in the pages of our tale. Dancing was resumed after supper: but several of the guests began to take their departure. Foremost among them were Christian and Christina. We should observe that Lord Octavian Meredith did not make his appearance at all in the supper-room; and amidst such a number of guests his absence was not noticed by Sir Frederick and Lady Anastatia Latham. Yet he had not quitted the mansion: he had no heart for the festivity—but he still lingered at Tudor House in order to breathe one last farewell in Christian's ear. He seized this opportunity just before her departure with her brother.

"God bless you, Christina!" he said, taking her hand and for a moment pressing it fervidly.

The look that he flung was full of unutterable emotions; and for an instant—but only for an instant—her own courage seemed to be giving way within

her. But the next moment it was regained; and she hastily whispered, "Remember, my lord, it is in your power to achieve Zoe's happiness for the remainder of the time that God may permit her to dwell upon this earth."

Christina then quickly turned away; and taking her brother's arm, proceeded with him to the carriage; for their adieux had already been paid to Sir Frederick and Lady Anastatia.

We have said that several of the guests took their departure about the same time, immediately after supper. Amongst these was Viscount Rushbrook: for, contrary to his usual habit, he remained not to take his fill of the delicious wines which were placed upon the board. In spite of his mingled flippancy and recklessness, he felt uneasy: that countenance haunted him—yet dimly, vaguely, and impalpably; for, as we have already said, he had not the slightest idea of the individual's features—no definite notion of the lineaments of that face.

It was Queen Indora's carriage which had brought Christian and Christina to Tudor House; and we must here observe that the groom happening to be ill, the coachman only was in attendance upon the equipage. It was the first carriage to issue from the grounds of Tudor House; and while it was proceeding along, Christina was relating to her brother everything that had passed between herself and Lord Octavian Meredith. All of a sudden the carriage stopped; and the coachman shouted out, "Now then, my man, what is it that you want?"

A rough voice, speaking what appeared to be broken English, implored that whoever might be inside the carriage would give alms to an unfortunate Lascar sailor. The coachman gave vent to an ejaculation of impatience, and was on the very point of urging the horses on again,—when Christian, putting his head out of the window, ordered him to stop a few moments longer while he complied with the mendicant's request. At the same time the false Lascar himself came up to the carriage; and coolly opening the door, began thanking the young gentleman for his liberality. Christian, setting down the fellow's presumption to the account of his ignorance, drew forth his purse; and the chink of gold

caught the Lascar's ear. In the twinkling of an eye he snatched the purse from Christian's hand, and darted away with the speed of lightning. Inspired with indignation at this feat, as audacious at it was villainous, Christian sprang from the carriage, and rushed after the false Lascar.

It was in a very lonely part of the road that this incident occurred; and the road itself was too narrow just at that spot for the equipage itself to be turned round in pursuit. The reader will understand that the daring robber had rushed away in the direction from which the carriage had come; and therefore towards Tador House. Christina screamed as her brother sprang forth: but he was too indignant to think at the moment of her alarm, and too courageous to care for the danger which he might have to encounter. He flew as if on the wings of the wind in pursuit of the Lascar, whom he overtook at a distance of about a hundred yards from the scene of the robbery. The fellow turned round to face his pursuer, at whom he aimed a desperate blow with a large bludgeon which he carried; but Christian, nimbly evading it, at once grasped the bludgeon and closed with the plunderer. So well directed and so irresistible was this attack, that the false Lascar was thrown down; and Christian, wrenching the bludgeon from his hands, hurled it to a distance over one of the high hedges that skirted the road. The prostrate robber endeavoured to gripe our young hero by the throat: but Christian not merely protected himself bravely, but likewise overpowered the Lascar effectually. At that moment the sounds of an advancing equipage were heard: another desperate attempt of the Lascar to free himself was defeated: and finding himself foiled and powerless, he said, in unmistakable vulgar English, "Come, young feller, take your purse back again, and let me go."

But Christian kept him down until the equipage came up to the spot; and it proved to be the dashing phaeton belonging to Lord Rushbrook.

"By heaven! the scoundrel Lascar who robbed me the other night!" ejaculated the Viscount, giving the reins to his groom, and springing into the road.

"He is no Lascar, my lord," said Christian,—"but an English scoundrel

in disguise. His speech has just betrayed him."

"Ah! is it you?" exclaimed Rushbrook, now recognising Christian. "By heaven! this is a bold feat which you have evidently performed! Here—let me fasten a hold upon the villain likewise."

Rushbrook, although naturally a coward, was now brave enough when he saw that the work was already done for him; and he took a firm grasp of the Barker's garments: for we need scarcely inform the reader that he was the individual of whom we are speaking. Christian likewise kept hold of him; and they ade him got upon his feet.

"Well, I say," growled the Barker, "this is a pretty pickle for an honest chap like me to be placed in. But blow me! if this meeting isn't a queer-one!"—then turning to Rushbrook, he added, as he looked him very hard in the face, "What about that there safe and the kesh box?"

The Viscount's hands suddenly quitted their hold upon the Barker's garments, as if those hands were paralysed; and he staggered back a pace or two. At the same instant, by one desperate jerk, Barney released himself from the hold which Christian Ashton had upon him; and in the twinkling of an eye he had darted right through the hedge with the force of a cannon-ball. Our hero flew after him—but stopped short at the hedge; for it was a barrier which he did not choose to attempt the bursting through after the same fashion as the escaped robber.

"What did he mean, my lord?" demanded Christian, somewhat indignantly, and with still greater astonishment, as he turned towards the nobleman.

"I can't for the life of me understand," replied Rushbrook. "It was a sudden pain which seized upon me—"

"It is excessively provoking," cried our young hero, "after the trouble I took and the risk I incurred. But he said something about a safe and cash-book?"

"Did he?" inquired Rushbrook. "Well, I did not hear him—or at least did not understand. It was a sudden sickness—a dizziness that seized upon me—something at supper which disagreed with me—"

"It is indeed provoking!" ejaculated Christian. "So daring a robbery——"

"He robbed you, then?" ejaculated Rushbrook.

"Of my purse, which contained some twelve or fifteen pounds. For that I care comparatively nothing——but the annoyance of letting the ruffian escape——"

"Well, all I can say, my dear fellow," responded the Viscount, "is that I could not help it; and I am exceedingly sorry for it. I repeat, it was a sudden dizziness that came over me. And I say, be so kind, Mr. Ashton as to keep the matter a secret; for people are so malleable in this world—they may put a wrong construction on the affair—they may pretend that I was afraid—and I should get unmercifully laughed at——"

"I really have no inclination to say anything that could annoy your lordship," responded our hero; "and perhaps too I am not altogether satisfied with myself in having let the ruffian go. But what was that ejaculation which burst from your lordship's lips? Had the man robbed you?"

"Did I say so?" asked the Viscount, not being previously aware that in the sudden excitement of the moment he had thus betrayed that incident.

"Why, my lord," said the groom, now speaking for the first time, "it must be the same person dressed in white——"

"Ah, who *tried* to rob me the other night?" interjected Rushbrook. "That was what I meant! But one's idea gets so confused when anything of this sort happens——"

"Very confused indeed, my lord," said the groom, with a certain dryness which showed he thought that his master was not altogether speaking the truth in some way or another—an impression which Christian likewise entertained, though he could not possibly conceive what motive Rushbrook might have for such prevarication and self-contradiction.

"Well, at all events, Mr. Ashton," said the Viscount, anxious to make an end of the matter, "we agree to keep it secret. And pray, above all things, don't say a word when next you go to Tudor House—for my sister would be frightened out of her wits, and she would not sleep a wink if she knew

there were robbers in the neighbourhood. I will give a private hint to the police to-morrow—and that will be sufficient."

Rushbrook ascended into his phaeton; and at this moment, Queen Indora's carriage, having been turned round at some distance ahead, came up to the spot. Christina was rejoiced to find her brother in perfect safety; and on his entering the carriage, he related to her everything that had occurred. They both agreed that there was something peculiar and unaccountable in Lord Rushbrook's conduct; but it was impossible to conjecture the motive thereof.

On reaching London, the carriage put down Christian in Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square; and thence proceeded with Christina to Queen Indora's villa at Bayswater.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

UNCONSCIOUS REVELATIONS.

LET us see what in the meantime has been taking place at the Queen's villa. Her Majesty—having seen Christina on in the carriage, which was to take up her brother in Mortimer Street and bring the twins to the grand entertainment at Balham Hill—returned to the chamber in which lay the wounded Sagoona. The ayah had for a week continued perfectly unconscious of the attention bestowed upon her; and though Indora had no doubt as to some mischievous design having been harboured by this Hindoo dependant, she relaxed not from those ministrations which in the pure spirit of Christian goodness were bestowed. And there lay the girl, pillowed in a luxurious couch with her queenly mistress watching every variation of her countenance and applying a cooling beverage to her when they appeared to be dry with feverish thirst—and devoting as much sedulous care to the wounded female if she were a beloved sister while Indora was endeavouring to snatch from the grasp of death.

Seated upon a small ottoman by the side of that couch, Indora fell into profound reverie, as she gazed upon the sleeping countenance of the ayah.

"And is it possible, Sagoonah," she thus inwardly apostrophized the unconscious invalid—"is it possible that you could have been culpable of so much dissimulation and of so much wickedness? Methought that you loved me—that you sincerely sympathized with me in all I myself felt and suffered at the time you agreed to accompany me from our far-off Indian home to this western clime. But, ah! you cherished a passion for him whom I also loved, and whom I shall ever love so tenderly and so well! I remember a while ago—one night when I was expecting him to call at the villa—that I spoke to you, Sagoonah, on the subject of love: I asked if you had ever loved—and I fancied that you were happy in your supposed ignorance of love's pangs. But at that very time you loved him—Oh! you loved him!—and how you dissembled! Well well, do I know, Sagoonah, that the human heart has no power over its volition; and it cannot shield itself against the impressions or the images which by destiny's decree are to affix themselves upon it. Nevertheless, Sagoonah, there are duties which in such a case are to be performed; and those duties were *not* performed by you! No—for you should have told me the truth, and I should not have blamed you—I should have pitied you. Yes—you should have told me the truth; and you should not have accompanied me from India. But you yielded to your own infatuation: you were selfish—you were egotistical; and in thee I have been cherishing a reptile who sought to sting me, instead of a faithful dependant to soothe and comfort me. I gave you my confidence, Sagoonah—I told you all my love for him! At one time I explained my hopes—at another my fears: seldom did I conceal from you my intentions; and all the while you were a traitress and a hypocrite!"

Indora heaved a profound sigh as she reached this point in her musings; and so deeply were her feelings touched, that tears trickled down her cheeks. Her heart was generous—her soul magnanimous! and as she had embraced the Christian faith, so did she possess the purest Christian sympathies. Thus, even while musingly addressing her reproaches to the unconscious Sagoonah, she felt inclined to pity her

as the victim of an infatuated and hopeless love.

"Ought I really to blame you thus?" continued the Queen, still pensively apostrophizing the sleeping ayah: "or ought I not rather to look for as much extenuation on your behalf as circumstances admit? For, Oh! I myself know what the power of love is—what its impulses are—and how selfish it at times renders its votaries. My own life affords an illustration; and it is the only deed on which I have to look back with sorrow. Yes—for it was I who kept him so long a prisoner in that far-off kingdom of Inderabad; and it was cruel—it was selfish—it was barbarous, on my part! If I therefore have to retrospect with compunction upon such a deed as *that*, ought I not to be lenient in the judgment which I pass upon thee, Sagoonah?"

Here the Queen's musings were suddenly interrupted by a restless movement on Sagoonah's part: she tossed her arms uneasily, and turned her head upon the pillow, as if she suffered pain either physically or mentally—perhaps in both ways. The Queen rose from her seat and hastened to quiet the invalid. She took Sagoonah's hands in her own: she pressed them; then she passed one of her hands caressingly and soothingly over the smooth dusky-hued cheek of the ayah; and then she assured herself that the bandages of the healing wound were not disturbed. While thus tenderly ministering to her dependant, Queen Indora completely lost sight of whatsoever motives of dark mingling and deep resentment she had against the sleeping woman: it was only the invalid requiring all her attention that she at the moment beheld. And if anything were wanting to afford a complete illustration of the admirable qualities of Indora's character, this deficiency was now supplied by the unfeigned sincerity and unalloyed tenderness of her behaviour towards one who had proved her enemy.

Sagoonah appeared to have felt the soothing influence of her kind mistress's caresses, though mentally unconscious that they were bestowed; for she relapsed into a state of composure. The Queen was gently resuming her seat, when it struck her that some words were wavering upon Sagoonah's lips. She stopped short, and listened. Yes: the ayah murmuring something;

and this was the first time that a syllable had issued from those lips during the week which had now elapsed since the almost mortal wound was inflicted. It was evident that Sagoonah's consciousness was returning—and that as the lamp of life was regaining its power, it was beginning to light up the images and impressions that were most strongly marked in the cells of Sagoonah's brain.

Statue-like did Indora stand close by the couch—with upheaved bosom breathlessly listening to whatsoever might first coherently come from Sagoonah's lips. Again did the ayah move her arms, as if with a feverish uneasiness; and the Queen was about to soothe her with the mesmeric influence of caresses again, when the ayah spoke intelligibly and plainly, though feebly and in broken words.

"Yes—I did it all!—the wickedness was mine!" she thus murmuringly said. "But it was that fiend—the Frenchwoman—who prompted me! Oh, why did I listen to her? For all the plotting was against my dear good mistress—my mistress—the plotting—Indora—my mistress!"

Now Sagoonah opened her large dark eyes: she almost immediately closed them again; and for a few instants it appeared as if she were dead, so breathlessly silent did she lie. The Queen was alarmed, and placed her hand upon Sagoonah's bosom: but the heart was beating within. Again did the ayah slowly open her eyes, and look up vacantly at the countenance that was bending over her. Thus for upwards of a minute did she gaze at her royal mistress; and when she closed her eyes again, it was without any sudden glitter to show that she had recognised the countenance which thus bent over her. But once more did her tongue give utterance to feebly articulated and broken sentences; and once more did the Queen listen with breathless attention.

"Yes—it was that fiend the Frenchwoman—Madame Angellique," continued Sagoonah, "who did it all. Ah! that night—when I penetrated into the Queen's chamber—the intent was horrible—it was to take her life! Christina saved my mistress on that occasion—or she would have been dead, dead!"

There was another long interval of silence, during which Indora listened in a state of dismayed and horrified suspense for whatsoever might next come from Sagoonah's lips.

"Ah! that temptress—that vile, vile woman!" again murmured Sagoonah: "it was she who urged me on!—Oh!" and here the ayah shuddered visibly, and with a violence that shook the very bed beneath her, "how could I have touched that reptile? Its fangs might have entered my flesh!—its venom might have circulated in my veins! Ah, my poor mistress!—that day you took me to the gardens—the—the——"

The rest of the sentence was lost in incoherent murmurings; but Sagoonah had said enough to send a light horribly flashing in unto the brain of the Queen, clearing up in a moment the mystery of that serpent's presence within the walls of the villa some little while back. Indora was as shocked—appalled: the revelation was as frightful as it was unexpected. Sagoonah, conscience-stricken even in her unconsciousness, was thus giving a species of subdued delirious vent to the terrific incidents of guilt which weighed upon her soul.

"The messengers from India came at the moment," continued the ayah, in the same murmuring broken accents as before: "the reptile was in the couch—all was prepared—death was in its sting—venom in its fangs: but heaven would not permit my mistress to perish *then*! Take it from me—take it from me, that hideous reptile!—Oh, take it, take it from me! Oh, oh!"

Again was Sagoonah's form convulsed with a violent shudder: the bed shook under her—she writhed upon the couch—she half-turned round in spasmodic convulsion: again were her arms tossed and agitated wildly. This time Indora had not the presence of mind to apply her soothing influence: she was transfixed to the spot with the horror that like a night-mare filled her soul. This last revelation from Sagoonah's lips, in respect to the cobra di capello, was so frightfully incredible—and yet all circumstances combined to prevent it from being for a single moment disbelieved!

"That English girl—Christina Ashton—continued Sagoonah, in feebler and more broken accents than those in which she

had late spoken, "is an angel in earthly form! She has told me of the angels of her creed—and she is one—she has spoken of herself! She is the Good Genius of my mistress: her presence is a talisman against all evil to Indora. No no, vile woman!—no, no, Madame Angelique! I will do nothing more to Indora! Christina's presence saves her. Fool! you carry her off—but she comes back—she escapes from your toils—she is an angel—an angel of her own creed! Nor can you dispose of her as you will—that angel—that angel—angel!"

Here was another revelation for the Queen: the mystery of Christina's forced abduction was now cleared up.

"Yes, Christina escaped from you, vile woman!" continued Sagoonah: "she came back—to be the Good Genius of my mistress, who is kind to her! Oh, I will do no more to Indora! But that Englishman—the first whom I ever loved—Ah! his image is here—here—here!"

Sagoonah turned uneasily upon her pillow; and with a low gasping sigh she laid her right hand upon her heart. Again she opened, her large dark eyes; and she appeared to look slowly around with the vacant astonishment, half-dismayed and half-inquiring, of a young child who awakens in a strange room. Indora bent over Sagoonah to see if she would be recognised: but the lids closed gradually, and with an air of heaviness; upon the ayah's eyes: the long ebony lashes again resting upon the dusky paleness of the cheeks. There was another interval of *eterno*, during which Sagoonah appeared to sleep in profoundest tranquillity,—until her bosom began slowly to heave with one long deep-drawn sigh, and more words, wavered murmuringly upon her lips.

gaunt, squalid, emaciated form! Away, away to a magistrate!—let the blow be struck at once—a double blow—a blow that shall crush *him* and over-whelm *her* with despair! Yes—a blow that shall destroy both at once! There has already been too much of love: the time has come for hatred. But, no! not in this white dress of mine which mark the slave! Who will believe me? Then what am I to do? Ah, happy thought! apparel myself in the Queen's raiment—become a lady at once—go richly dressed into the presence of the magistrate—and then, then he will believe me!"

It was thus that Sagoonah re-enacted in her conscience stricken unconsciousness—and in the fever of her half-subdued, half-hushed delirium—that last scene which had entailed upon her so frightful a result. Indora continued to listen with breathless attention, but with dismayed and horrified feelings. Everything was now revealed to her;—had Sagoonah made a regular and intentional confession, it could not have been more explicit, nor could its details have been more lucidly defined. The Queen saw that for some time past she had indeed been cherishing a serpent who sought to sting her: she had been standing upon a mine to which the hand of the false Sagoonah was at any moment to apply the torch; and she was horrified—she was astounded in one sense—but in another how grateful was she! And there—by the side of that couch on which the guilty woman lay, now silently sleeping once more—Indora knelt; and in the fervour of her Christian piety she poured forth her thanksgiving to the true God whom by Clement Redoliffe she had been taught to worship. Nothing more came that night from the lips of Sagoonah; and Queen Indora retired to rest in an adjoining room. Frequently, however, during the night did this royal lady rise to see that the nurse who in the meanwhile had taken her place, was doing her duty towards the invalid: for notwithstanding that Indora had now obtained the complete reading of the whole sum of Sagoonah's monstrous iniquity, yet not for an instant would she neglect that being whom her own kind cares had saved from dissolution.

The Queen heard Christina return home in the carriage; and she could

scarcely restrain herself from hastening at once to tell the young lady how all the mysteries of Sagoonah's wickedness were cleared up, and how the motive of Christina's forced abduction at the time was now thoroughly comprehended. But Indora resolved to wait until the morning; for she knew that Miss Ashton must feel fatigued after the entertainment from which she had returned so late.

The Queen did not suffer her young friend to be disturbed until she herself rang the bell for the maid shortly after nine o'clock in the morning; and then Indora, who was already up, proceeded to Christina's chamber.

"My dear girl," she said, "there are many topics upon which I have never spoken to you much, or at which I have only lightly glanced; but it is now suitable that you should know more of those subjects."

With this brief preface, the Queen proceeded to explain to the horrified and amazed Christina how Sagoonah in her uneasy slumbers avowed sufficient to prove with what murderous intention she was inspired, when penetrating one night into her chamber,—adding, "And it was you, my sweet Christina, who were my guardian angel at the time! Yes—Sagoonah herself has declared that you are an angel!"

The Queen then recited the ayah's unconscious confession relative to the cobra da capello, and also in respect to Christina's forcible abduction by the infamous Frenchwoman. But Indora said nothing relative to that portentous secret which regarded Clement Redcliffe, and which Sagoonah had intended to use as the means of dealing a blow of twofold vindictiveness. To all however that was told her, the young maiden listened with those feelings of blended horror and wonderment which such revelations were but too well calculated to excite; and as she threw herself into the Queen's arms, weeping and sobbing, she murmured, "Oh, dear lady! it has been heaven's own hand that has guided you safely amidst so many and such frightful perils!"

In the course of the forenoon Mr. Redcliffe called; and Indora communicated to him everything that had issued

from the lips of Sagoonah on the preceding evening.

"Rest assured, my dear Indora," said Mr. Redcliffe, "that all the affairs in which I am in any way mixed up, are gradually but surely approaching a crisis. When any circumstances which it so deeply concerns an individual to bring to an issue, are thus unravelling themselves—when past mysteries are being cleared up as if by means simply accidental—and when a clearer insight is afforded into whatsoever was previously dark and uncertain,—rest assured, I say, that the end is not far distant. Have no fears for the result: I myself am full of confidence! My plans are working:—day by day are the meshes tightening in around those whom it is necessary or expedient to involve in such toils, and to place completely at my mercy; and the further I proceed, the clearer, the easier, and the more certain becomes the path which I have to pursue. Beware, however, lest Sagoonah should speak in the presence of that nurse——"

"I have taken every precaution," responded the Queen. "I have purposely told sufficient to Christian to render that amiable girl interested in watching Sagoonah's beside at those times when I myself cannot be there; and the very instant that words begin to waver on Sagoonah's lips, the nurse will be dismissed from the chamber. Besides, as Christina takes her turn with me in thus watching, there is so little need for the presence of the nurse at all!"

The Queen and Mr. Redcliffe continued to discourse for some little while longer; and then the latter took his leave—he having business of importance to attend to in respect to the various plans which he had in operation. Christian called in the forenoon; and after spending a couple of hours at the villa, he hastened away to see his dearly beloved Isabella Vincent.

to give me your kind assistance in watching by the side of Sagoonah's couch."

Christina, intending to confine her ramble to the garden, threw on a large summer straw-hat, and issued forth from the villa. She had caught up a volume of poems before leaving her rooms; and on passing out into the garden, she endeavoured to fix her attention upon the book—but she could not. Her cheek was indeed pale, as the Queen had noticed: but this pallor was not the effect of the entertainment only. The young maiden had been thinking of all that took place between herself and Lord Octavian on the preceding night; and though not for a single instant did she regret the line of conduct she had pursued, yet she could not help feeling the influence of those occurrences. She loved one who was the husband of another; and with all her sense of duty it was impossible to stifle and crush this love in her heart. Yet there was a serenity, if not an actual happiness, in Christina's thoughts, when pondering the intention of Lord Octavian to rejoin his wife, the amiable Zoe.

Christina felt as if the air of the garden did not do her any good—as if it wanted that elasticity and freshness which could alone benefit her; and opening the gate, she passed into the road. Thence she turned into a lane at a little distance; and along this well-shaded narrow avenue she rambled with the book in her hand, but with her thoughts fixed on subjects far different from its contents. Be it recollected that it is the month of September of which we are writing. The day had been sultry—it had left a portion of its heaviness in the evening atmosphere; and this was the reason why Christina had fancied that the air in the garden had been deficient in elasticity.

She was proceeding along the lane, when all of a sudden she heard footsteps behind her, preceded by a sound as if of some one bursting through the hedge; and on looking back our heroine found herself confronted by a figure that filled her with a sudden terror. The aspect of the individual was alone sufficient to strike her with this dismay; but it was all the greater when the conviction rushed in unto her mind that she beheld before her the ruffian of the

previous night's adventure. The Lascar's dress was just the same as it struck Christina to be when the fellow, having opened the door of the carriage, snatched the purse from her brother's hand—the same too as he subsequently described it to her. We need hardly add that the wretch was the Barker: but it may be proper to observe that he now at once recognised Christina—for he had seen her walking in the Queen's garden at the time he was on the watch to consummate his murderous purpose.

For a few moments Christina's tongue was paralyzed with dismay; and she could not give vent to the scream which rose up in her throat. The Barker, who carried a bludgeon in his hand, burst out into a coarse chuckling laugh—and said, "You're an uncommon pretty gal; and it would be a sin to frighten you. Come young Miss—just hand us over your purse, as well as that there gold watch and chain—and there's nuffin more to be said."

Christina swept her eyes up and down the lane: but no one was to be seen except the ruffian who stood before her; and the nearest houses were too far off to be reached by a scream if she sent one pealing forth from her lips. She was frightened—she was dismayed: the Barker grew impatient—and in a still more savage tone than that in which he had before spoken, he exclaimed, "Out with the parcel off with the chain!—or by jingo I'll help myself!"

The imprecation was however more terrible than the comparatively moderate one which we have inserted in its place; and Christina was sinking with terror, when it struck her that she heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs at a distance. Inspired by the hope of aid, she darted away from the spot, but the ruffian was immediately at her heels—and for a few moments he violently seized her by her dress. Her screams rang forth as she struggled desperately with the miscreant; and all of a sudden a horseman appeared round the corner of a diverging lane. The Barker's ear had not caught the same sounds which had heralded this approach of succour to that of Christina; and he was suddenly stricken with alarm on beholding this unexpected appearance. For he in a moment recognised the

horseman—although the latter recognised not him in that Lascar garb which he wore.

Up to the spot the horseman rode: he sprang from his steed; and the Burker, who had let go his hold upon Christina, aimed a tremendous blow with his club at the young maiden's champion. The latter dexterously avoided it—and sprang forward to grapple with the ruffian,—when the last-mentioned individual thought it better not to hazard a conflict; and rushing through the hedge, as he had done on the preceding night, he disappeared from the view of Christina and her deliverer.

The young maiden was sinking with terror; for at one moment she had fancied that murder's work would be done, and that nothing could save her champion from the fury of the blow dealt against him. Her deliverer now turned towards her; and with the most gentlemanly courtesy he spoke a few reassuring words. Then he hastened to pick up her straw hat which had come off, as well as her book and her parasol which she had dropped in her fright. The horse meanwhile had remained upon the spot, although its rider had let the bridle go; and the animal was now feeding on the grass by the side of the lane.

Christina expressed her gratitude in suitable terms; and feeling full of confusion on account of the dishevelled state of her hair and the disordered condition of her toilet, the blood came back to those cheeks which an instant before were pale with terror. Her deliverer was struck by her extraordinary beauty, though there was nothing disrespectful in his gaze: on the contrary his entire manner and conduct were marked by the kindest and most polished courtesy. He was a young man—a little past four-and-twenty years of age—exceedingly handsome—and evidently belonging to the best sphere of society. He now turned aside under pretence of looking after his horse, but in reality to give Christina an opportunity of arranging her hair and restoring her toilet. This the young maiden hastily did; and when her deliverer again turned towards her, it was still with blushes but with more self-possession than at first, that she

renewed the expression of her thanks for the service he had rendered her.

"Do not think the less of my courage," said the gentleman, smiling,— "or rather perhaps I ought to entreat that you will not tax me with cowardice in not pursuing the ruffian; but it was entirely through the fear that you were overcome by your alarm and might need prompt assistance."

"It would be impossible, sir," replied Christina, "to harbour a thought so ungenerous, so unfounded, and so insulting towards one who has served me so signally."

The young gentleman bowed in acknowledgment of this assurance; and then said, "I presume that you reside in this neighbourhood?"

"At a distance of about a mile," answered Christina.

"You will permit me to escort you as far as your dwelling?" said her new acquaintance: for it is quite possible that villanous Lascar may be loitering about in the neighbourhood."

Christina gladly and thankfully accepted the proffered courtesy: her deliverer threw the bridle over his arm and walked by the horse's side, so that he might keep better companionship with Christina.

"You are deceived, sir," she said, "as to that man, although it is very natural you should be guided by appearances. He is not a Lascar—but some English robber in disguise."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the stranger with astonishment.

"Yes, it is as I tell you," rejoined Christina. "He robbed my brother last night as we were returning from a party: there was a conflict—a struggle—but, to be brief, the man escaped."

Christina's companion surveyed the young lady with the utmost interest while she spoke; and yet he had sufficient command over his feeling of admiration to prevent it from bordering upon rudeness. He thought he had never seen any one so exquisitely beautiful as she by whose side he was now walking. Her countenance, her figure, her looks, her manners—the silvery tones of her voice—all formed a combination of charms and attractions that ravished his heart. He longed to

know more of her, and to improve his acquaintance with one who thus in a few minutes had made so deep an impression upon him. But all the while Christina herself was perfectly unaware that her blended beauty and modesty had inspired her companion with so much interest on her behalf.

He now inquired the exact particulars of what had occurred between herself and the robber. The details were not long; but as Christina gave them, her deliverer drank in the sound of her voice as if they were those of a delicious music. When she had done speaking, he proceeded to give her to understand that he was an officer in the army—that he was on leave of absence from his regiment—and that he was temporarily staying with some friends at Kensington. He congratulated himself on the fortunate occurrence of having taken an evening ride in that particular direction; and he concluded by intimating that his name was Captain Stanley.

Immediately struck with this name, Christina glanced rapidly towards her companion—and said, "Might I ask whether your father is Sir William Stanley who resides near Liverpool?"

"The same!" cried the Captain, both overjoyed and astonished at this species of recognition on the part of the beautiful young lady whose acquaintance he was so anxious to cultivate. "But how is it possible——"

"I have heard Mr. Redcliffe speak of you," replied Christina, thus anticipating the question.

Mr. Redcliffe!—that kind generous man!" exclaimed Captain Stanley; "as brave too as he is kind—for he saved my father's life amidst the jungles of India!"

"Mr. Redcliffe is a kind friend of mine," rejoined Christina; "my brother lives with him altogether. I myself am residing with an Eastern lady of rank and wealth; and our habitation is yonder villa."

"Rejoiced as I at first was," said Captain Stanley, "in having been enabled by circumstances to render assistance to a young lady, even while believing her a total stranger,—infinitely more delighted am I now on finding that we are not altogether unknown to each

other. I only arrived in town yesterday; and it was my intention to call on Mr. Redcliffe to-morrow. Perhaps—perhaps," added the Captain hesitatingly, "I may venture likewise to call at your residence, to assure myself that you will in the meantime have perfectly recovered from the alarm produced by this incident."

All the rules of politeness as well as the additional ones of gratitude prevented Christina from giving a negative response to this request; and with artless candour she said, "If you do me the honour of calling, Captain Stanley, the Lady Indora with whom I live will personally express her thanks for the service you have rendered one for whom she cherishes a sisterly affection."

The portion of the dialogue took place in the road from which the lane diverged; and the gate of the villa was now in sight. Scarcely had the young maiden given the answer just placed upon record, when a gentleman on horseback was seen rapidly approaching; and Christina at once recognised Lord Octavian Meredith. She instantaneously became aware of the necessity of maintaining all her fortitude, her firmness, and her feminine dignity; for the conviction smote her that he was there, in that neighbourhood, to seek an interview with herself—perhaps a parting one—before he fulfilled his promise by going abroad to rejoin Zoo. Captain Stanley did not notice that anything peculiar had at the moment transpired to startle his fair companion; for she was indeed startled by a single instant on recognising Lord Octavian. As for his lordship himself, he suddenly drew in his bridle and brought his steed to a halt at a distance of about twenty yards from Christina and Captain Stanley; then, the next moment, he abruptly wheeled round his horse and galloped away.

"The gentleman appears to have taken the wrong road," observed the Captain, utterly unsuspecting of how well Christina was acquainted with him; "and he has only this instant perceived his mistake."

"Perhaps so," said the young maiden, scarcely knowing what she did say: for all her self-possession abandoned her as a sudden thought flashed in unto her brain.

Was it possible that Meredith could have fancied she was walking with a rival?—that it was a suitor for her hand whom she beheld in her company, and who with the familiarity of intimacy had dismounted from his horse in order that he might the more conveniently and agreeably enjoy the pleasures of discourse? Innocent and artless though Christina were, yet no young lady of her age could be so utterly inexperienced in the ways of the world as not at once to perceive how naturally and even reasonably a suspicion of that sort might strike the mind of Lord Octavian Meredith.

The gate of the villa was now reached; and Captain Stanley said, with a polite bow, "I will do myself the pleasure of calling to-morrow. But you have not honoured me by saying for whom I am to inquire?"

"This is the Lady Indora's villa," answered Christina; "and I am Miss Ashton."

"Good evening, Miss Ashton," rejoined Captain Stanley; and springing upon his horse, he rode away from the spot.

Christina's feelings had been suddenly and powerfully wrung by the incident in respect to Lord Octavian Meredith. She had no unmanly desire for the young nobleman to be convinced that she loved him; but on other hand she was averse to the idea that he should suppose she had been favouring the suit of another. For she saw at once that supposing it to be really the case that she had thus favoured another suit, and if it were indeed a reality that her heart or her hand was engaged elsewhere—she ought at once to have mentioned the circumstance on the preceding evening at Tudor House as the best means of silencing the allusions to his own love which were made by Lord Octavian. She perceived that *he*, putting his own construction on the fact of her being with a handsome young gentleman, as Captain Stanley was, would naturally conclude that she had acted coquettishly, and even immodestly in not having told him on the previous night that her heart was engaged to another. The idea of all this was most repugnant to the pure notions and delicate feelings of our amiable heroine.

On passing into the grounds attached to the villa Christina felt so annoyed and distressed that she could not immediately enter the house. If she did she would be courted questions on the part of the Queen—questions which might turn upon a topic that she did not like to approach. Therefore, to compose her thoughts and collect her self-possession, Christina rambled through the garden. It is but the strictest justice to our heroine to declare most positively and unreservedly that she had not the slightest anticipation of what was to follow; or else not for worlds would she have placed herself in a position to encounter it. Twice had she slowly made a tour of the garden—for the third time was she taking the round with the intention of entering the villa when this last stroll was completed. She reached that extremity which joined the field—the point that was remotest from the house, and was most enveloped in the shade of the umbrageous trees—the spot, in a word where Sagoonah's interviews had been wont to take place with Madame Angelique. Christina had reached that spot, we say, when there was a sudden rustling amongst the evergreens, and Lord Octavian Meredith stood before her.

All in moment our heroine's fullest self-possession came to her aid: all her dignity was summoned up; and what she had just been thinking of in connexion with the previous incident, was absorbed in that of wounded pride, bordering on resentment, that the young nobleman should thus seek her after his solemn promise at Tudor Lodge. He himself was ashy pale, but labouring under a deep concentrated inward excitement: his white lips were compressed—his arms were folded across his breast—he stood confronting her with the air of one who sought an explanation, was determined to have it, and fancied that he had a perfect right to demand it.

"We meet, Christina," he said, "for the last time;"—and his voice sounded unnatural in its lowness and hollowness.

"Our meeting of last night, my lord, responded Christina firmly, "should have no sequence. Remember your pledge—and you have broken it!"

"Listen to me—listen to me but an instant!" he said, with such concentrated vehemence that he seemed

scarcely able to restrain the outbreak of feelings tremendously agitated. Circumstances would not permit me to depart until to-morrow: and I could not resist the temptation of riding round into this neighbourhood—for accident made me aware of the place of your abode, which I never knew till this morning. I met Sir Frederick Latham, and he spoke of you. That was how I learnt your place of residence. I did not mean to seek an interview with you—I respected my pledge—I intended to observe it—God knows,” he added bitterly ‘it is more than ever my intention to keep it now after what I have seen!’”

“What you have seen, my lord?” exclaimed Christina, indignantly: and then, the next moment, she was half suffocated by the feelings which surged up into her throat: but she held back the words to which they would have prompted her to give utterance, for she was suddenly smitten with the conviction that it would be more dangerous and unmaidenly to vindicate herself by explanation than to allow Lord Octavian to remain under the impression which he had received from his own construction of the recent incident on the road.

“I tell you, Christina,” he exclaimed vehemently, “that I did not mean to seek an interview with you! I considered our parting of last night to be final—and heaven knows the pang it cost me to breathe that word *farewell*! But I could not resist the temptation of riding round here to catch a glimpse of your home—of the place where you dwell. Oh, if I had foreseen—But it is better thus! it is better thus!” he passionately ejaculated: and yet he made a movement as if to stamp his foot with maddened rage.

“Yes it is better thus my lord,” said Christina, who endeavouring to entrench herself with a becoming feminine dignity, in reality became surrounded with a reserve that was not merely cold, but even had the air of haughty defiance.

At least so Meredith thought; and the idea was natural in his own morbid state of feeling. He therefore said with a tone and look of bitterest reproach, “You feel that you have dealt ungenerously with me—heartlessly—coquetishly; and you take refuge within the circle of your own haughty pride. You

may tell me that I have no claim upon you—and you are right: for I am another’s! You may tell me likewise that you are the mistress of your own actions, and that you owe no account of them to me: and again you will be right. But, Oh! Christina, had you for an instant been candid with me—had you suffered me to know when last we met—I do not mean last night—but the other day when I rescued you from the persons who were carrying you off—had you told me *then* that your heart was engaged to another—because it must have been so even *then*—for this attachment of yours cannot be merely of to-day—Oh! Christina, you would have awakened me from a dream—you would have aroused me to my senses! But no, no—you did not! I told you that I loved you—you knew it—I even went so far as to declare that all my hopes of happiness were concentrated in the idea—the *one* idea that you might yet become my own adored and cherished wife; and you did not tell me that you loved another! It is true that you answered me with what methought was a becoming maiden dignity—and I loved you all the more tenderly for it. But still there was something in your manner, Christina, which at the time bade me hope—”

“No, my lord—no!” vehemently interrupted the young maiden, who had hitherto listened with the reader may conceive how much distress and anguish of mind to that long and passionately delivered speech, which was full of maidenly propriety would not permit her to explain away.

“Oh, but it was so, Christina!” exclaimed Meredith, terribly excited. “But if not *then*, what of last night? Think you that when the first word of allusion to this maddening, despairing love of mine had fallen from my lips, think you I ask, whether my speech would not have been checked if you, with that candour which I fancied you to possess, had at once told me that you loved another? Oh! Christina, it was not well of you. My God! how much have I suffered on your account!—and to be rewarded thus! If you loved me not, it was your duty to proclaim that fact. To keep it back, was to bid me hope! It was worse—it was playing the part of a coquette!—it was heartless—it was wrong!”

Overwhelmed with these reproaches—half-believing them to be just so long as Meredith remained under his present impressions in respect to the circumstances of her being seen with Captain Stanley—half-resentful, on the other hand, at the bitter accusations thus hurled against her—yearning to explain everything, yet daring not to pronounce the words “I do not love another,” for fear they should be taken as the avowal of “I love you,”—distressed and bewildered—wanting to say something, yet knowing not what to say—anxious to fly from the spot, yet transfixed there by the power of her feelings.—Christina leant against a tree for support; and the tears flowed thick and fast from her eyes.

“Oh! now you weep,” exclaimed Meredith. “Weep on, false-hearted girl! An hour ago every tear you are at present shedding would have fallen like a drop of molten lead upon my heart, and I should have gone mad with grief! But now it does me good to see you weep, and to know that I have wrung those tears from your eyes! Ah, I envy not the man who will conduct *you* to the altar, deceiver that you are! Until within the hour that is passing, I would have staked my soul on your candour—your truthfulness! My God, how I should have been deceived! It would have been selling the soul of mine to Satan—and *you*, perfidious girl, the cause! Ah, though I am married—and it was as a married man that I dared love you, Christina—you know not the heart with which you have trifled, and which you have broken! Yet I will not curse you—No! ten thousand times no! I bless you Christina!—and may God grant you with another all that happiness which, circumstances permitted, it would have been my pride and joy to ensure you!”

The young nobleman made a hasty movement as if to turn abruptly away. Christina, on her part, made a movement as if about to speak: but she could not give utterance to a word. His excitement was moderating into a profound mournfulness: her distress and anguish of mind were rising into a terrible excitement.

“Yet one word more!” he said, for an instant arresting his own steps: “and I have done! Forgive me that I

blamed you—pardon me that I reproached you! I have been too vehement—too impetuous! I was wrong, Christina.—I was wrong! But my feelings hurried me away. Once more—and for the last time do I pray heaven to award you its blessing! Yes—may you be happy and blest!”

With these words Lord Octavian disappeared from Christina’s presence. She started forward: his name was at the very tip of her tongue: she was about to call him back: but with such an effort or fortitude as only the purest mind and most virtuous being could have commanded under such circumstances, she restrained herself—the name was not spoken—and he reappeared *not* in her presence.

“Yes—it is better as it is,” thought Christina to herself. “Let him fancy that I love another!—it will all the more easily wean him from that infatuation which as well nigh produced such fatal effects upon the amiable Zoe!”

And now, in a frame of mind that was fraught with a marvellous calmness—with all the pious resignation of a self-sacrificing, self-martyrising spirit—Christina Ashton re-entered the villa.

Lord Octavian Meredith hastened homeward, riding as if he were a madman mounted upon a mad steed. On gaining the more frequented parts of the town, he dashed amidst the vehicles with a recklessness which made every one who beheld him think that he was intoxicated with wine. Nevertheless, he reached his home in safety. Springing from his horse, he tossed the bridle to the domestic, who was half astonished and half frightened at his master’s appearance: but Meredith saw not the effect which his strangely wild excitement produced. He rushed into the house: he summoned his valet, and gave immediate orders for his clothes to be packed up and for the carriage to be got in readiness, as he intended to start by the night train for Dover. The valet was as astonished as the other domestic had been; and yet he knew his master too well to suppose for an instant that he had been drinking. He therefore thought that some sudden calamity, or else some serious indiscretion, must have driven Lord Octavian

Meredith to the resolve of this precipitate departure. In order to lead Octavian, if possible, into conversation, the valet inquired, with every appearance of completest deference whether his lordship did not intend to see Mr. Armitage before he took his departure?

"No—it is not necessary!" replied Meredith petulantly. "I will leave a note, to be sent him to-morrow. Hasten you to get everything in readiness: prepare your own things likewise, for you will accompany me."

Having thus spoken, Octavian hastened to the drawing-room, where he sat down and penned a few lines to Mr. Armitage. He simply said that being alarmed on account of Zoe's health and considering that he was not doing his duty in allowing her thus to remain separated from him, he was about to rejoin her with the least possible delay. He then thought of writing a few last words to Christina: but he could pen nothing that satisfied him. Sheet after sheet did he tear up:

and when the valet entered to announce that everything was ready for immediate departure, Lord Octavian was commencing a new epistle, and still too without any satisfaction to himself. This last sheet of paper he therefore tore into fragments, like the former ones; and speeding down the stairs, he sprang into the carriage.

Now he gave full vent to the excitement which was torturing him:—he covered his face with his hands—he burst into an agony of weeping: he sobbed like a woman or a child.

"O Christina, Christina!" he murmured, in a broken voice; "to think that you could have loved another!"

The unhappy young nobleman proceeded to Dover: on the following day he passed over to Boulogne; and thence he journeyed with all possible dispatch, to rejoin that wife whom he was now seeking in the frenzy of desperation rather than under the influence of a pure unalloyed sense of duty.

